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NEWS

Dallas-Fort Worth metro area now includes 12 entire counties

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ARLINGTON — The bright lights of the big city are spreading deeper in rural North Texas, so much so that by 2030 it is expected to encompass 12 counties — making the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area the second biggest swath of urbanized land in the United States behind greater Los Angeles.

Recognizing that imminent growth, the Regional Transportation Council on Thursday unanimously approved expanding the North Texas metropolitan planning area, a federally recognized distinction that determines how much money is available for transportation and air quality dollars, to include 12 counties.

The previous boundary for the Metroplex, which last underwent major changes in 1992, included all of Tarrant, Collin, Dallas, Denton and Rockwall counties and portions of Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman and Parker counties.

Thursday's actions expanded the territory to include all of those nine counties along with all of Hood, Hunt and Wise counties.

Outlying counties supported the change.

"We always participate when we need it. Clean air is an example," Parker County Judge Mark Riley told transportation council members in a previous meeting. Many Parker County residents may live in a countrylike setting west of Fort Worth, but they are already considered residents of the region's nonattainment zone — a part of the state that doesn't comply with federal air pollution laws — and are asked to comply with regulations such as car emissions restrictions.

Even so, Thursday's action came despite some concerns among Dallas-area leaders that the expansion would give too much political influence to the western side of Dallas-Fort Worth. Two of the three new counties — Hood and Wise — are on the western side of the area.

Transit council member and Dallas County Commissioner Maurine Dickey noted that the council, which used to be made up of 40 elected and appointed officials, has recently been expanded to 43 members.

"The Texas Senate has 31 members in it. We've got 43 in here," Dickey said. "We just don't need to be any bigger than we are. It's just a bit chilling to a discussion."

But Dickey added that a lot of her concerns had been satisfied in talks this week with the North Central Texas Council of Governments' transportation staff.

The new planning area will include 9,441 square miles of land, second in the U.S. only to 38,649 square miles in Los Angeles, as defined by Southern California Association of Governments..

The previous Metroplex boundary included only 4,969 square miles and was only the 15th-largest planning territory even though it has the fourth-highest population among U.S. metro areas.

Regional Transportation Council In other action Thursday, the council also:

Heard an update about an 18-month-old project in which \$500,000 in regional funds was used to hire two Army Corps of Engineers staffers to speed up the permitting process for transportation projects. The new employees at the corps, which is responsible for safeguarding the nation's waterways, helped local transportation planners secure permits in some instances and avoid the permitting process in others, said Dan Lamers, senior program manager for the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

Projects that have benefited include the proposed Southwest Parkway toll road west of downtown Fort Worth and a Union Pacific Railroad bridge over Clear Fork Trinity River.

The program expires Dec. 31.

Source: North Central Texas Council of Governments

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