

LOCAL NEWS

State, federal transportation officials to gather in Fort Worth

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BY GORDON DICKSON

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Proposals to unclog freight train traffic near downtown Fort Worth and reintroduce streetcar service to the area are among the projects that will be highlighted Monday during the seventh annual North Texas Transportation Summit.

Among the scheduled speakers during the one-day event at Texas Motor Speedway is Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who is considering several major Dallas-Fort Worth transportation projects for additional federal stimulus funding.

Dallas-Fort Worth residents will also continue pressing state and federal officials for more funding to expand highways such as Interstate 35W in north Fort Worth.

"This is a yearly opportunity to get me and the folks that toil in this, at the state and local levels, to connect and make sure all our priorities are aligned," said U.S. Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Lewisville, who is hosting the summit in his district.

Several key players at the state level will also address the invitation-only crowd at the speedway's Texas Grand Ballroom.

Among them are Texas Transportation Commission member Bill Meadows of Fort Worth and state Rep. Joe Pickett, D-El Paso, chairman of the House Transportation Committee.

One project perceived to be a strong candidate for stimulus funding is Tower 55, the rail intersection near downtown Fort Worth.

Two of the nation's biggest railroads, BNSF and Union Pacific, have requested \$70 million to add a third north-south rail line at the intersection and 9,000 feet of track. Also in the request is

funding for new car and pedestrian crossings, including an area just north of downtown Fort Worth where children are known to cross the tracks on their way to Charles E. Nash Elementary School.

"There will be a lot of questions about Tower 55," said Russell Laughlin, a senior vice president for Alliance developer Hillwood Properties, who closely follows transportation issues. "It was the No. 1 statewide project in three or four ranking methodologies, in terms of improving goods movement, creating jobs, air quality."

Other projects awaiting federal funding:

A proposed streetcar service connecting downtown Fort Worth to museums, hospitals and the Trinity Uptown project on the north side. The Regional Transportation Council, Fort Worth and the Fort Worth Transportation Authority — also known as the T — have put aside \$2 million for planning and design.

A proposed commuter rail line from southwest Fort Worth through Grapevine to Dallas/Fort Worth Airport. The T expects to submit a federal transit new-start grant request for about \$250 million, or roughly half of what is believed to be needed for the 40-mile project.

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