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## **Stretch of NE Loop 820 has Dallas-Fort Worth's three worst bottlenecks**

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NORTH RICHLAND HILLS -- Commuters who spend rush hour inching along Northeast Loop 820 know that the congestion is bad.

A report released Tuesday provides further proof that traffic there is more stop than go.

For the second consecutive year, westbound Loop 820 at Rufe Snow Drive is the worst bottleneck in the Metroplex, according to INRIX, a navigation software firm that measured gridlock using real-time data from a variety of GPS devices.

The stretch at Rufe Snow is congested 43 hours per week, with the worst congestion between 5 and 6 p.m., according to the 2009 National Traffic Scorecard.

Coming in at No. 2: westbound Loop 820 at Holiday Lane, followed by eastbound Loop 820 at U.S. 377.

"It's pretty bad every day," said Mike Brown, a sales associate at Pep Boys, at Loop 820 and Rufe Snow.

He said many commuters -- including himself -- come up with their own routes to avoid 820.

"I have to take back streets going home," said Brown, who lives in Arlington.

Officials are hopeful that a freeway widening project will someday knock Loop 820 from the top spot.

The North Tarrant Express is a \$2-billion-plus makeover of Loop 820, Airport Freeway and Interstate 35W in Northeast Tarrant County. The first phase, which includes rebuilding and expanding 820 from I-35W to North East Mall, is scheduled to begin this year and finish by 2015.

The project would add toll lanes, nontoll lanes and new frontage roads.

The report validates the need for the expansion, said Robert Hinkle, director of corporate affairs for NTE Mobility Partners, the private consortium behind the project.

"None of that data surprises me whatsoever," Hinkle said. "All you have to do is drive that segment ... and you can understand why this project is needed and wanted."

The string of bottlenecks starts as traffic from northbound Texas 121, northbound Loop 820 and westbound Texas 183 converges out of the interchange that overlooks North East Mall. The

standstill typically begins at Holiday Lane and continues as drivers brake their way past Rufe Snow, where traffic begins to pick up to semi-normal speeds.

Randy Clinton, executive director of the Community Enrichment Center -- which sits just off of 820 between Rufe Snow and 377 -- said traffic regularly creates problems for people coming to meetings at the social-service agency. Sometimes they are as much as an hour late because they don't realize just how difficult the traffic is.

"It's bad just about any part of the day," Clinton said. "People who live here, we kind of get used to it."

Overall, five of the 10 worst spots in the Metroplex are in Tarrant County, with the other five in Dallas County. Other bad spots in Tarrant County are at southbound I-35W near downtown Fort Worth and southbound Texas 360 at Six Flags Drive in Arlington.

The five worst bottlenecks in Dallas are along southbound I-35E.

## Across the U.S.

Nationally, Dallas-Fort Worth was fifth for traffic congestion, the same as in 2008.

Overall, congestion has decreased since 2007. But as fuel prices drop and the economy begins to pick up, so does gridlock.

"So goes traffic, so goes the economy," Bryan Mistele, INRIX president and CEO, said in a news release. "Traffic congestion can tell us whether businesses are shipping products, whether people are going to work and whether shoppers are going to the mall. That said, our analysis indicates that what happens going forward in terms of increasing gridlock, much like the economy, can be summed up in one word: Jobs."

Jim Bak, a spokesman for INRIX, said data also show that more people are driving in the afternoon and evening, suggesting that if they're not going to work in the morning, they're job hunting later in the day.

Other highlights from the report:

Metro areas with either high levels of unemployment or reduced tourism had the largest decreases in congestion, including Detroit, Honolulu and Chicago.

With the reopening of the Interstate 35W bridge that collapsed in 2007, Minneapolis dropped from 10th to 12th on the most congested list.

Traffic delays during afternoons, evenings and weekends were up 25 percent, suggesting that stimulus projects are contributing to congestion.

Staff writers Gordon Dickson and Diane Smith contributed to this report.

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