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S.H. 121 opens region for development

BY STEWART JAMES

November 30, 2009

The completion of the State Highway 121 and U.S. 75 interchange in 2010 marks the end of the 26-mile expansion of S.H. 121, which should spark the next wave of commercial develop in Collin County.

What used to be a 45-minute drive to the airport now takes 25 minutes and citizens and employees can now drive from McKinney to Fort Worth in the same time it use to take to drive to areas of Frisco, said David Pitstick, executive director of the McKinney Economic Development Corp.

The Sam Rayburn Tollway, formerly known as S.H. 121, extends northeast from State Highway Business 121 near the Dallas/Denton County line to U.S. 75 in Collin County. Since 2007, the North Texas Tollway Authority and the Texas Department of Transportation have worked together on the toll road that passes through the cities of Allen, Carrollton, Coppell, Fairview, Frisco, Lewisville, McKinney, Plano and The Colony. The Sam Rayburn Tollway became part of the NTTA System on Sept. 1, 2008.

“I don’t think the real value of 121 has been realized yet by the business community,” Pitstick said. “It is such a stark difference from the travel distances even three months ago businesses and investors have not caught on yet but they will over the next several years.”

Pitstick said the same was true for the George Bush Tollway when it opened and it took a little time for people to truly appreciate what it does. Now, no one can imagine what it would be like without it, he said.

Robert Winingham, executive director of the Allen Economic Development Corp. said the roadway will bring mostly office and corporate offices. Over the last two years, Allen has brought in a significant number of retailers to the area so the focus continues to be office and corporate developments, he said.

“The highway improvements will certainly make the area more and more attractive over time but the market demand has been there for some time,” Pitstick said.

The property on the northeast corner of S.H. 121 and U.S. 75 has



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been the topic of legal debate between the city of McKinney and the developer, O&S Holdings.

The northeast quadrant of S.H. 121 and U.S. 75 would already have been back on track if it weren't for extremely complex legal systems that surround real estate investment and bankruptcy protection, Pitstick said.

"It is just a matter of clearing legal obstacles and unwinding complex legal entities," Pitstick said. "For some time, there has been a very strong interest from the investment community in building a major business center at that location. It will happen. The highway improvements will just make it better."

Winningham agrees.

"Now that you can see it and touch it, it will make it a lot easier to attract quality businesses," Winningham said.

For decades, Texas led the country in transportation infrastructure development.

In the five years following World War II, one-quarter of all highway work in the United States occurred in Texas, according to the Texas Transportation Institute. The state's farsightedness in its 1950s and 1960s highway design allowed its trunk and U.S. highway system to readily upgrade to new federal interstate standards in the 1970s. The impact of this farsightedness is dramatic: the highway system alone has contributed \$2.8 trillion to the Texas state economy over the past 50 years, and more than \$100 billion each year since 2004, according to TTI.

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