Multimodal Solutions in the North Central Corridor are being implemented to solve one of the region’s most challenging transportation problems. Major freeway reconstruction, combined with light rail transit service, arterial street improvements, and various traffic management strategies, represent a truly multimodal solution to this critical regional transportation corridor.

North Central Expressway (U.S. 75) is the largest major freeway reconstruction project in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area. The freeway is being widened from four to eight lanes, showcasing state-of-the-art traffic management and design elements. Light rail transit service commenced in January of this year with the extension of DART’s red line from the Pearl Station in Downtown Dallas north to the Park Lane Station. These and other multimodal transportation improvements are featured in this edition of Regional Mobility Initiatives.

The North Central Corridor is important to the entire metropolitan area, from both a transportation and economic standpoint. This transportation corridor provides a vital north-south link for persons and goods traveling within, to and through our region. Below are facts about the corridor, which stretches from the Dallas Central Business District through the cities of Dallas, Highland Park, University Park, Richardson, Plano, Allen, and McKinney.

- Nearly 12% of Dallas-Fort Worth urban residents live in the corridor.
- Over 22% of the employment in the urban area is located in the corridor.
- North Central Expressway carries about 150,000 vehicles per day or twice the design capacity of 75,000 vehicles per day.
- DART light rail ridership rose to nearly 30,000 passengers per day when rail service was introduced to the corridor in January of 1997.
- About 21% of DART bus trips pass through the corridor.
North Central Expressway opened in 1949 as a four-lane expressway. However, the story of North Central Expressway begins in 1921, when Dallas Mayor Frank W. Wozencraft appointed a committee to study the feasibility of a major north-south traffic artery. In 1927, the city of Dallas adopted the Ulrickson Plan which outlined the Central Boulevard project.

Central Boulevard (as the thoroughfare was then known) was the No. 1 street project of its day. The original plans called for a 10.2 mile, $1 million, six-lane super expressway that would extend from the Trinity River to the then Dallas city limits at Northwest Highway.

Touted as “one of the best thoroughfares of its kind in the United States,” (Dallas Morning News, August 24, 1947), the project was extended in the mid 1950s to north of Richardson. North Central Expressway was to serve as the connector from the burgeoning suburbs to the city’s central business and entertainment district. The extension escalated the cost of the project to $21.3 million.

Additional construction during the 1960s and 1970s further extended the thoroughfare northward through Plano, Allen, and McKinney, providing a vital linkage to Interstates 35, 45, and other transportation corridors.
When North Central Expressway opened, newspaper accounts called it a “super thoroughfare...the biggest and most expensive public improvement that has been made in Dallas...” (Dallas Times Herald August 18, 1949). Editorials predicted that “Central Expressway will do more than relieve traffic congestion...It will be the kind of public improvement that promotes city growth.” And promote growth it did! Design engineers at the time could not envision the dramatic impact the expressway would have on the growth of the region.

When the first phase of North Central Expressway opened, Dallas city limits stopped at Northwest Highway. What would later become major economic centers to the north, such as Plano, Richardson, and Allen, were known as the blacklands and primarily consisted of farmland. Trips to these areas were considered weekend trips to the country. With the tremendous growth of North Dallas and the suburbs in the 1960s, 70s and 80s came an increase in daily commuter activity within the North Central Corridor. By the early 70s, traffic on Central Expressway had reached design capacity and the freeway became synonymous with traffic congestion. The further development of suburban communities to the east (Mesquite, Garland, Balch Springs); south (Duncanville, DeSoto, Lancaster, Cedar Hill) and west (Grand Prairie, Arlington) coupled with continuous growth of industry to the north, created a traffic nightmare.

In the early 1970s, the Texas Highway Department recognized a need for improvement. Years of research and study resulted in a plan that included twin elevated lanes. The double decking plan (as it was known) was met with major opposition from both the local residents and the business community. The public outcry resulted in the city of Dallas withdrawing its support, thereby sending the plan for expansion back to the drawing board.

The North Central Task Force

The negative public outcry to the double decking plan led to the formation in 1984 of the North Central Task Force, a public/private partnership. Its objective was to develop consensus solutions to better serve the North Central Texas region, rather than a single community.

Working in concert, a technical solution was developed that was both politically and environmentally acceptable to adjoining communities. In 1986, this consensus plan was approved by the Texas Highway Commission (now the Texas Transportation Commission).

The Task Force put into place the framework necessary to carry out the reconstruction of the project. The efforts of the task force have taken major highway reconstruction to a new level. For the first time, the Texas Department of Transportation established a project-specific design team and project office. Due to the complexity of the project, a team approach was taken to ensure that the concerns of all segments of the community were heard.

The North Central Task Force brought to the table the cities of Dallas, Highland Park, and University Park; Dallas County; the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT); Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART); residential neighborhoods; and the business community. The result is a multimodal solution that truly ties together the North Central Texas region.
Implementing Multimodal Solutions and Traffic Management During Reconstruction

Of prime concern during the reconstruction of North Central Expressway was the issue of maintaining mobility in the corridor. The reconstruction provided the opportunity to introduce new multimodal and traffic management solutions into the corridor.

Light Rail Transit

Since their introduction, the DART light rail system has gained in popularity with additional service extensions underway.

The North Central rail line extends from Park Lane south along the former Southern Pacific Railroad alignment to Mockingbird Lane. Some rail crossings at major streets are grade separated and some crossings are at-grade, protected by crossing gates. Stations are located at Park, Lovers and Mockingbird Lanes. At Mockingbird Lane, the North Central rail line descends into two tunnels beneath North Central Expressway. The trains resurface in Downtown Dallas. One underground station will be located between Lemmon and Haskell at Cityplace and begins operation in 1999. During the construction of the rail line, tunneling was also completed for a potential Knox-Henderson Station.

In addition to the three stations located within the corridor, there are six stations in the Central Business District and eleven stations in the southern sector of Dallas. Many stations feature amenities to encourage public use. Among them: convenient transfers to local bus routes, bicycle security, free parking, and food vendors.

The starter system is the first phase of DART’s 53-mile light rail system. By the year 2010, it will connect to a regional commuter rail system that extends to Fort Worth and DFW.
Mobility Assistance/ Courtesy Patrol

The City of Dallas and the Texas Department of Transportation work together to minimize the impacts of traffic incidents in the corridor. Within the corridor, disabled vehicles account for 80 percent or more of all incidents, while traffic accidents account for less than 20 percent.

In January 1992, TxDOT began operation of the North Central Courtesy Patrol on weekdays from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. The route covers North Central Expressway from Interstate Highway 635 to downtown, and Interstate 635 from Preston Road to Greenville Avenue. The purpose of the patrol is to keep North Central Expressway open and traffic moving by assisting the police department at the scenes of traffic incidents, offering free roadside assistance to stalled motorists, and removing debris from the roadway.

Two TxDOT employees are assigned to each patrol. They operate a half-ton truck with special equipment:

- heavy-duty bumper to push cars off the roadway;
- containers of gasoline, water and compressed air;
- plug-in battery jumper;
- state and Dallas police radio and cellular telephones;
- arrow board to direct traffic;
- emergency flashers;
- tools, flares, cones, rainsuits and other necessary emergency equipment.

Building Partnerships through Communication

The key to the success of the North Central Expressway project has been communication. When undertaking a project this complex, open lines of communication must be established early and maintained throughout. Property owners, tenants, commuters, neighborhood associations, businesses, municipalities, governmental entities, design firms and construction teams work together to build consensus on the project. The TxDOT North Central Expressway project office took a proactive stance in bringing timely information regarding changes, scheduling and minor inconveniences. The response has been an informed and supportive public. Several techniques have been incorporated into the reconstruction project to provide accurate construction information in a timely manner to residents, businesses and travelers in the corridor.

- Portable changeable message signs are used to notify motorists of future traffic control changes and current traffic conditions in the construction zone. Permanent signs are being installed on freeways that interchange with North Central Expressway. Motorists can choose an alternate route based upon the information provided them by these signs.

- Information on daily lane closures are provided to the media, traffic reporting services, police and fire officials, DART and other agencies. The local newspaper prints selected daily closures.

- The WIDEN 75 (214-943-3675) automated telephone hot line provides information on daily lane closures, ongoing construction information for corridor projects, severe weather highway closures, and information on other highway projects. WIDEN 75 is advertised by printed materials and by signs on the freeway and streets crossing North Central Expressway.

- Special fliers are distributed to target audiences. In addition, North Central Expressions is a quarterly publication for people interested in construction projects within the corridor. To obtain a copy call 972-994-0034.

- Town hall meetings and individual briefings allow various interest groups to participate in maintaining mobility during the reconstruction project.
Traffic Management

Keeping the North Central corridor moving has been the underlying theme of the reconstruction project. The highway and transit projects have been designed with this goal in mind. Transportation improvements have been successful because the general public has been able to travel through the corridor during construction with only a minimal increase in congestion. Total daily corridor traffic volumes have decreased only two percent since construction began. Daily traffic volumes on North Central Expressway have decreased by only 10 percent, with most volume reduction occurring during off-peak.

Another focus of the reconstruction project has been to ensure that nearby residential neighborhoods and businesses experience minimal impact from traffic displacement on North Central Expressway. Working with community groups, a traffic management plan was developed to route traffic through the area in a safe, efficient manner. All parties involved with construction of North Central Expressway are working to ensure that businesses experience only minimal impact to their operations. The North Central corridor is a major economic asset, and the tax base must be preserved. Traffic control plans for construction place special emphasis on mobility maintenance to minimize any adverse effects.

North Central Traffic Management Team

Paramount to the success of traffic management during construction is the North Central Traffic Management Team (NCTMT). The team was created to improve the overall operations and safety of the transportation system throughout the corridor through better coordination among the public agencies. The NCTMT monitors the planning process, construction and operations; identifies potential mobility-related issues; and either modifies the planning and operations or develops mitigation measures.

The team consists of representatives from TxDOT; DART; the cities of Dallas, Highland Park and University Park; and the North Central Task Force, staffed by the Texas Transportation Institute. Its responsibilities include planning, design, construction, maintenance, operations, enforcement and public information. The assigned members are knowledgeable about the operations and can effectively discuss the issues. They also have the authority to make decisions committing their agencies’ resources to a team project. Cooperation and communication have yielded the success of transportation management in the corridor.

Their goal is to provide a safe, acceptable level of mobility for persons traveling through the corridor during reconstruction. With the number of governmental, neighborhood and business interests involved, a minor problem can become a major issue if not dealt with through this team concept.

The cooperation and coordination among the public sector, private interests, and community groups have produced a synergistic effort that has overcome numerous hurdles. Three examples of the diversity of the issues faced during the project are:

- Archaeological investigation of a Civil War-era cemetery for African Americans;
- Temporary freeway lanes and ramp schemes for main lane construction sequence; and
- Contingent construction sequence for right-of-way purchase.
**Reversible Lanes**

Downtown Dallas is connected to East Dallas by two major thoroughfares—Live Oak Street and Ross Avenue. During reconstruction of the freeway, these thoroughfares serve as important links from Downtown Dallas to alternative north-south routes including Greenville Avenue and Skillman Street.

Before implementation of the reversible lane system, Ross Avenue was a five-lane undivided street (two inbound lanes, one bidirectional left turn lane and two outbound lanes), and Live Oak Street was a six-lane undivided street. Because of community opposition, street widening was not an option to increase capacity on either street.

In June 1993, Ross Avenue and Live Oak Street became the first reversible lane system in Dallas. Both streets were restriped for five lanes with reversible lane markings. During weekday morning rush hours in order to accommodate the morning peak-period traffic flow, three lanes are used for inbound, one lane as a continuous two-way left-turn lane, and one lane for outbound traffic. During afternoon rush hours, the reverse of the morning configuration provides three lanes outbound.

During off-peak weekday hours and weekends/holidays, the lane designations are two lanes inbound, a continuous two-way left-turn lane, and two lanes outbound. The reversible lanes have been successful in enhancing mobility in the corridor without widening the street through expensive and unpopular roadway reconstruction.

**Rerouting Commuters**

In 1987, the city of Dallas estimated that about 47,000 trips a day would be diverted from North Central’s main lanes and service roads during various stages of reconstruction.

The challenge became how to move commuters onto these alternate routes with the least amount of inconvenience to the public while minimizing the amount of congestion on these roadways. Diverted trips were anticipated to utilize other north-south thoroughfares in the corridor such as Dallas North Tollway, Preston Road, Hillcrest Road, Greenville Avenue, Skillman Street and Abrams Road and to cause a ripple effect as far east as LBJ Freeway in Mesquite and as far west as Stemmons Freeway in Dallas.

A number of improvements to relieve congestion within the corridor were evaluated. Five thoroughfares: Abrams Road, Skillman Street, Park Lane, University Lane, and Lovers Lane, and over 60 intersections were identified as candidates for bottleneck improvements before the North Central Expressway reconstruction. The selection criteria were the effectiveness at relieving congestion and the feasibility of obtaining additional right-of-way. Capacity analyses were performed to evaluate the potential bottleneck improvements. The improvements included reconstruction and improvement of left-turn lanes. The thoroughfare projects were evaluated to ensure implementation of the most...
21st Century North Central: A Corridor for the Future

By the year 2000, North Central Expressway will have in place highway and transit improvements to accommodate the travel demand of the 21st century. The “new” North Central Expressway corridor incorporates a myriad of aesthetically pleasing design amenities aimed at increasing mobility in the entire region.

Urban Living – Uptown

The reconstruction of North Central Expressway is a major part of the region’s plan for urban renewal. Throughout the 1990s, the North Central corridor has experienced a resurgence of interest on both the business and residential level. Recently, a number of major corporations including Blockbuster, and Union Pacific Railroad, have announced plans to relocate to the Dallas Central Business District.

For the first time in more than 30 years, new residential property is being developed in the area between the Central Business District and the Turtle Creek area. Lofts, townhomes, garden homes and small apartment complexes have opened in the area. Many of these developments have utilized older office buildings of historical importance to the region such as the Adam Hat Company, Hart Furniture, and H. & L. Green. The old Titche’s/Goetting’s building, which in its heyday competed with Neiman Marcus and Sanger-Harris as one of Dallas’ retail giants, has been converted to a Distance Learning Center for colleges and universities in the North Central Texas region. The Dallas Education Center houses Texas A&M University at Commerce, Texas Woman’s University, the University of North Texas, and the University of Texas at Dallas within its landmark structure. Cityplace, Uptown and Short North Dallas are creating an urban working and living environment not seen in Dallas since the original construction of North Central Expressway opened the gateway to the suburbs. Now its reconstruction has revitalized these hidden jewels of communities.

Economic Growth in the Corridor

Larger in population than 27 U.S. states, the Dallas-Fort Worth area is a national economic leader, and provides nearly one-third of Texas’ gross domestic product each year. The North Central Corridor is a vital part of our region’s economy. Over 508,000 people live in the corridor, and the number of jobs located in the corridor is over 527,000. Even while undergoing freeway and transit construction, the North Central Corridor’s office occupancy rates have remained high.

The city of Plano, at the northern end of the corridor, has seen population grow nearly tenfold since 1970, while Collin County grew by 500 percent over the last quarter century. The North Central Corridor has been an important factor in that growth and will continue to be
Mobility in the 21st Century

With additional multimodal transportation improvements planned, the North Central Corridor will remain a high profile business address in the 21st century. The completion of the eight-lane superhighway in 2000 will set the stage for further growth, both within and outside the corridor. Mobility 2020, the transportation plan for the region, calls for the extension of the light rail transit line through Richardson and into Plano. Work has been completed on the reconstruction and widening of the expressway from Walnut Hill Lane into Richardson. The plan recommends adding lanes to U.S. 75, from the George Bush Tollway north through McKinney. Plans for the corridor also include the reconstruction of the interchange at U.S. 75 and I.H. 635. From Downtown Dallas to Park Lane, North Central Expressway will feature depressed highway lanes 25 feet below grade level with the frontage roads and cross streets built at-grade.

Mobility 2020 also calls for High Occupancy Vehicle lanes on U.S. 75 from IH 635 LBJ Freeway to S.H. 121. Throughout the North Central Corridor, a full complement of Advanced Transportation Management communications systems and services are planned. These will provide real-time information to travelers, emergency response personnel, and highway, arterial and transit system operators regarding system conditions in order to facilitate travel.

This multimodal approach to transportation planning, design and construction will be a model for solving the region’s transportation problems. As funding for transportation continues to decrease while demand increases, multimodal solutions and interagency partnerships will be necessary to address the future of transportation in the region.
Summary of Construction Costs

The North Central Expressway reconstruction project was made possible through cooperative funding. The Texas Department of Transportation, Dallas Area Rapid Transit, and the city of Dallas pooled resources to maximize the benefits of corridor reconstruction while minimizing the impact on taxpayers. For example, TxDOT used State discretionary funds for its portion. DART relies on local sales tax revenues and federal allocations to expand its light rail system, and the city of Dallas uses general obligation bond funds.

| Estimate of Construction Costs for the North Central Corridor* |
|----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
|                      | TxDOT               | DART                 | City of Dallas       | Total               |
| Construction         | $602,753,000        | $223,000,000         | $57,500,000          | $883,253,000        |
| Right-of-Way         | 130,820,000         | 13,200,000           | 20,200,000           | $164,220,000        |
| Plan Preparation     | 70,974,000          | 23,300,000           | 3,600,000            | $97,874,000         |
| Construction         | 27,124,000          | 10,060,000           | 3,500,000            | $40,684,000         |
| Engineering and      |                     |                      |                      |                     |
| Inspection           |                     |                      |                      |                     |
| LRT Systems          |                     |                      |                      |                     |
| and Vehicles         | 65,293,000          |                      |                      | $65,293,000         |
| Total                | $831,671,000        | $334,853,000         | $84,800,000          | $1,251,324,000      |

* Based on projected costs for North Central Expressway from Woodall Rodgers Freeway to and including the U.S. 75/I.H. 635 interchange, and North Central rail line of the DART 20-mile starter system.

A Success in the Making

Freeway reconstruction and light rail construction in the North Central Corridor (one of the oldest freeways in the nation) provide special challenges to planners, engineers, policy leaders and the public at large. The success of this project has depended upon painstaking consideration of several planning and construction issues including:

- Involvement of government agencies and private groups in planning and construction;
- Trade-offs between expediting construction and maintaining travel in the corridor and access to adjacent properties;
- Use of unique and unusual construction methods;
- Coordination of mobility efforts;
- Improvements to alternative routes before the freeway construction began;
- Management of traffic incidents; and
- Provision of timely information to the public.

Estimate of Completion Dates for the North Central Corridor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>North Central Expressway</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LBJ to Walnut Hill Lane</td>
<td>Complete</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walnut Hill Lane to Monticello Avenue</td>
<td>1998</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monticello Avenue to Woodall Rogers Freeway</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>U.S. 75/I.H.635 Interchange</td>
<td>2005-08</td>
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<tr>
<th>DART Light Rail Transit</th>
<th>Year</th>
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<tr>
<td>Central Business District to Park Lane</td>
<td>1999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finish Cityplace Station</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extension of North Central rail line (red line)</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Park Lane to LBJ Freeway</td>
<td>2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBJ Freeway to Richardson (Arapaho Road)</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richardson to Plano (Parker Road)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northeast rail line from Mockingbird Station along MKT Railroad line</td>
<td>2002</td>
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<tr>
<td>through northeast Dallas to Garland (blue line)</td>
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What Is NCTCOG?

The North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) is a voluntary association of local governments within the 16-county North Central Texas region. The agency was established in 1966 to assist local governments in planning for common need, cooperating for mutual benefit, and coordinating for sound regional development. North Central Texas is a 16-county region with a population of 4.2 million and an area of approximately 12,800 square miles. NCTCOG has 227 member governments, including all 16 counties, 161 cities, 26 independent school districts, and 24 special districts.

Since 1974, NCTCOG has served as the Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for transportation in the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan Area. The Regional Transportation Council is the policy body for the Metropolitan Planning Organization. The Regional Transportation Council consists of 35 members, predominantly local elected officials, overseeing the regional transportation planning process. NCTCOG’s Department of Transportation is responsible for support and staff assistance to the Regional Transportation Council and its technical committees, which comprise the MPO policy-making structure.

We would like your comments . . .

If you have questions or comments regarding the transportation and air quality programs of the North Central Texas Council of Governments and the Regional Transportation Council or need additional information, please contact the NCTCOG Transportation Department at (817) 695-9240, by FAX (817) 640-3028 or via e-mail: mmorris@nctcog.dst.tx.us