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Residents Want More Deck Parks, Better Neighborhood Connectivity

By Brandon Formby - Oct 8, 2015

Armed with colored markers, dozens of Dallas residents late Thursday attacked large maps of congested highway corridors by marking up suggested changes to some of the region's most influential infrastructure.

But much of what they focused on had little to do with traffic.

Instead, they asked state transportation officials for better pedestrian connections between neighboring urban districts. They pointed to long and curly highway ramps that prevented large pockets of land from being developed.

Architect Todd Howard suggested putting a series of deck parks over the Interstate 30 canyon south of downtown, where a grid of city streets once helped people move seamlessly through the area.

"We need to connect the middle of the Cedars back through to City Hall," Howard said.

He and others were among those at the Texas Department of Transportation's first public meeting on CityMAP, an initiative that is rethinking how all of the aging highways that surround downtown are built.

The finished product will be a report that details different cost estimates, traffic impacts and probable construction timelines for a variety of options on each corridor. The Dallas City Council is expected to then decide which ideas it wants TxDOT to pursue.

"It's one of the biggest projects I've ever worked on," said James Frye, the lead consultant on the initiative.

At Yvonne A. Ewell Townview Magnet Center on Thursday, residents huddled in small groups around maps of various highway segments that included Interstate 35E south of downtown, I-345 on the western edge of Deep Ellum and an elevated stretch of I-30 north of Fair Park.

Benton Payne said the raised portion of I-30 not only segregates neighborhoods but has negatively altered how people use the city street grid since only a handful of streets provide access to the highway.

"So there are five streets that are supercongested and 15 that are underutilized," he said.

Mike Grace, a member of the Greater Dallas Planning Council, stood in the school cafeteria and watched people discuss their visions and mark up the maps. He said it was a different style than most transportation meetings.

"The fact that TxDOT is having this type of conversation, I'm impressed," he said.