



[Comments](#) 38 | [Recommend](#) 12

Dallas awarded \$43M in federal grants for roads, streetcars

07:29 AM CST on Thursday, February 18, 2010

By MICHAEL LINDENBERGER and ROY APPLETON / The Dallas Morning News
mlindenberg@dallasnews.com; rappleton@dallasnews.com

The \$23 million federal grant, which had seemed a long shot to regional leaders as recently as this week, is only about half what the city had asked for. City Hall officials said Wednesday they weren't yet sure how or if the proposal will be scaled back to reflect the smaller grant.

The two Dallas grants were among 51 doled out Wednesday, and the only ones to go to Texas.

"The grant program was simply way oversubscribed," Mendez said.

Reduced funding or not, Koop and others hailed the news.

Koop, who chairs the council's transportation committee, said the grant will pay for a starter loop that is expected to reach over into Oak Cliff. But she said work will continue on a larger streetcar initiative that could cost \$80 million and will complement a second downtown light-rail line when it opens in 2016. The starter loop to Oak Cliff should help boost those efforts, too, she said.

The focus on streetcars and other nontraditional forms of transportation has grown much more intense since President Barack Obama's election.

An early indication of Washington's support for the trolley lines came last month, when it announced it would no longer follow a Bush administration policy that subjected every major transit application to a cost-effectiveness measure that focused on how many vehicles it took off busy highways.

"It's a different paradigm in transportation now, and you've got to have sustainable communities. It starts with big cities," Koop said.

Even the reduced grant will go a long way toward helping plan construction of a streetcar loop, she said. As outlined in the federal announcement, the downtown Dallas streetcar line would originate at Harwood and Main streets.

It would run along Main to Houston Street, where it would connect with the Dallas Area Rapid Transit Authority and Trinity Railway Express lines at Union Station.

The line would also stop at the Dallas Convention Center (and the adjacent city-owned hotel now under construction); at the Trinity River park planned as one of the largest urban parks in the country; at Methodist Dallas Medical Center in Oak Cliff; the Oak Cliff Gateway area; and in several residential areas.

"We're excited," said Jason Roberts, founder and board member of the Oak Cliff Transit Authority, which helped write the grant proposal.

"It's a win-win. [Downtown] Dallas is getting a portion, and we're getting a portion."

He said city staff will have to be creative to build the starter loop with less money than they initially sought.

"What do we do with half the money? We're going to have to figure out where those dollars are going to be directed," Roberts said.

Bob Stimson, president of the Oak Cliff Chamber of Commerce and a former Dallas City Council member, called the \$23 million a good start.

"I'm pretty darn happy," he said.

Perhaps cost savings and other money sources can fill in the funding gap, Stimson said. In any case, he said, Wednesday's announcement "cements the idea that we are building a streetcar line from Methodist Hospital to downtown, and that can't be anything but good for Oak Cliff."

The streetcar grants generated the most buzz at City Hall Wednesday, but the separate, \$20 million State Highway 161 grant could have an even larger impact on area commuters. The grant will cover costs associated with a \$400 million government loan that will now be available to the North Texas Tollway Authority, a piece of good news that will greatly reduce the borrowing costs on that highway.

"We need to use every mode of transportation available," Johnson said. Highways alone, she said, won't cut the city's traffic congestion or improve its air quality.

Staff writer Rudolph Bush contributed to this report.

-