

# Movement on FM 1460 plan

By BRAD STUTZMAN  
Leader Editor

Without or without Texas Department of Transportation funding, the Williamson County Commissioners Court appears ready to move ahead with the FM 1460 expansion project that some have said will change the face of eastern Round Rock.

On Tuesday, commissioners are scheduled to enter an agreement with the Round Rock City Council. Each partner is slated to put up \$7.5 million for widening a two-mile stretch of FM 1460 from Palm Valley Boulevard to Old Settlers Boulevard.

That project is one phase of an overall plan to widen the seven-mile road; where medical and education centers have been built - and where more extensive commercial and residential development appears to be just around the corner.

Precinct 1 Commissioner Lisa Birkman of Brushy Creek said Friday Williamson County would welcome TxDOT funding, but the county and Round Rock probably need to proceed whether or not state financial help is forthcoming.

"We can't wait to see what

## FM 1460: County, city could enter agreement on road widening

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TxDOT is going to do," Birkman said.

County Judge Dan Gattis and county commissioners were originally scheduled to vote on entering the agreement with Round Rock earlier this month.

County officials put that vote on hold, waiting to hear from TxDOT.

TxDOT engineer Bob Daigh spoke at last week's Commissioners Court meeting, though he could not give a definitive answer on whether TxDOT would help fund the project.

It has, in fact, been the lack of available TxDOT dollars that's led to Williamson County, Round Rock, Georgetown and a private developer banding together to tackle the road project in the formerly rural fast growth-area east of Interstate 35.

The private-sector partner - Waterstone Development - plans

to build an upscale and high-density residential and retail center, similar to The Domain in northwest Austin.

"This is, in my opinion, a major, major thing for the entire county," Gattis said in August, following a Waterstone presentation at Commissioners Court.

### Holding out hope

On Friday, Birkman said the county is still holding out hope for TxDOT help.

"Rumor has it there is a possibility some additional funding for road projects will be announced," she said.

When contacted Friday by the *Leader*, Daigh said he does not yet know if TxDOT will recommit funding to projects it had once been committed to, but then backed off from for lack of money.

"We are working with the city of Round Rock (and Williamson County) to secure funding for that

much-needed project," Daigh said. "But at this point, if the question is do I have the money in my pocket, the answer is 'no.'"

Daigh said he still has motivation to find state dollars for the project, even though Williamson County and Round Rock appear prepared to proceed on their own if necessary.

"I am the director for this region," Daigh said. "If there is a way, we [will] cobble together some state and federal money."

"In a couple of weeks I believe I'll be able to come back with something concrete about FM 1460," Daigh told commissioners last week.

Some state officials have predicted a budget surplus for the coming year, but Daigh said TxDOT does not control how much money it receives from the Texas State Legislature.

"We deal with the funds that are allocated to us," Daigh said. "How much money we get is set by the legislature, not TxDOT."

### Change is coming

As recently as the 1980s, the whole seven-mile FM 1460 corridor was out in the country. Horses, sheep and cattle still graze in pastures - particularly on the northern end, known to Georgetown locals as Rabbit Hill Road - but the two-lane thoroughfare has in recent years become increasingly urbanized.

On the Round Rock end - closer to U.S. Highway 79 - the Round Rock Higher Education Center, Seton Medical Center Williamson and the Teravista subdivision have all been built. Additionally, in late August ground was broken at Texas State University's new School of Nursing.

Highway 79 serves as FM 1460's southern border. On the north it empties into Business 81 - also known as South Austin Avenue - in Georgetown.

Work on the project - widening FM 1460 from two lanes to four -

could begin next year.

Round Rock and Williamson County are each tentatively slated to widen about one mile of FM 1460, from Highway 79 (Palm Valley Boulevard), north to Old Settlers Boulevard.

On the other end of FM 1460, Georgetown will at some point be widening the road from where it intersects Business 81, south to Westinghouse Road.

Williamson County officials have said that at some unspecified future date the county will pay for widening FM 1460 from Westinghouse Road to University Boulevard.

That leaves Waterstone Development picking up about a one-mile stretch between Old Settlers Boulevard and University Boulevard.

Pending the results of a Nov. 4 election, Waterstone Development will pay for this through road district assessments that tax future development.

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