

# State surprises some by approving millions for FM 1460 project

County, city had seen told chances slim for funding

By BRAD STUTZMAN  
Leader Editor  
Good things come to those who wait - and

sometimes to those who don't.  
In an unanticipated development, the Texas Department

of Transportation and Round Rock city government announced Thursday that TxDOT will provide the entire funding - about \$15

million - for phase one of the FM 1460 widening project.  
The announcement came just days after TxDOT

engineer Bob Daigh had said there was no guarantee - and perhaps even little  
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## FUNDS: State steps in on FM 1460 project

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hope - state funding could be found for the job.

Wishing to proceed with or without TxDOT help, on Tuesday the Williamson County Commissioners Court voted 4-0 to enter an agreement with Round Rock for the first two miles of widening along the seven miles of road.

Round Rock was going to do the actual widening work and split the \$15 million cost with Williamson County. The Round Rock City Council had signed off on that plan in September.

Round Rock and Williamson County had each committed \$7.5 million for the job. Now that money can be used for other projects or future FM 1460 work, officials said.

The money TxDOT has committed will pay for widening FM 1460 (also known as A.W. Grimes Boulevard) from its southern end at U.S. Highway 79 (also known as Palm Valley Boulevard) north to Old Settlers Boulevard.

Williamson County, Round Rock, Georgetown and a private developer plan to eventually widen the entire seven-mile road - all the way from Highway 79 to where it empties into Business 81 (also known as South Austin Avenue) in Georgetown.

### Local leaders pleased

Government leaders from Williamson County and Round Rock expressed pleasure - and some surprise as well - with the latest development, stating it was something they had hoped for but not necessarily anticipated.

"I'm surprised," County Judge Dan Gattis said. "It sounds like it's going to happen."

"I was always hopeful that they were going to pay for it," Commissioner Lisa Birkinman said. "That's great news. That means we'll be able to fund a different portion of it [FM 1460]."

"I was surprised to some degree," said Pct. 4 Commissioner Ron Morrison, whose precinct takes in the Highway 79 to Old Settlers Boulevard stretch of 1460 where the first work will be done.

Morrison said Williamson County and Round Rock have always

had a good relationship with TxDOT.

Morrison said he believes the Texas Transportation Commission and TxDOT allocated the money because they recognize how much the project is needed.

"They realize, as we do, that this project has high priority due to the present volume of traffic and projected growth in the area," Morrison said.

Likewise, Round Rock Mayor Alan McGraw expressed pleasure with the TxDOT announcement.

"We praise TxDOT for recognizing the importance of this project, which is sorely needed to improve safety and accessibility in this rapidly developing corridor," McGraw said in a news release issued Thursday afternoon. "Northeast Round Rock is becoming a medical and educational destination for the region and this project

Thursday's developments.

"We had been hopeful that 1460 would have been directly funded with bond money that was passed by the Texas Transportation Commission today. It did not make the list," Daigh said. "Today, the commission voted to sell about \$1.5 billion in bonds. 1460 was not on that list... 185 [from Interstate 35 in Georgetown, northwest to Florence] was."

"However, the department did allocate some additional rehabilitation money to the Austin district and we are using those additional dollars to work with the city of Round Rock and Williamson County to have the first segment go forward. It should go to construction this spring."

### 'Epicenter of growth'

After Tuesday's Commissioners Court meeting, Gattis spoke with the Leader, calling the FM

Williamson County rancher - said he has watched the area change and grow over the decades.

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 narrow and winding two-lane thoroughfare has in recent years become increasingly more urbanized.

For example, Waterstone Development plans to build an upscale and high-density residential and retail center similar to The Domain in northwest Austin.

Pending the outcome of a Nov. 4 road district election, Waterstone will pay for widening portions of FM 1460 - plus adding arterial streets - and recoup its money through future assessments on retail and residential development.

### What's next?

Although Round Rock and Williamson County officials are smiling at their unexpected good fortune, they stressed money is still needed for widening all of FM 1460, not just the two-mile piece that goes from Highway 79 to Old Settlers Boulevard.

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

That still leaves the portion of FM 1460 from Old Settlers Boulevard to University Boulevard.

McGraw said Round Rock will work with TxDOT, Williamson County and Waterstone to ensure what's being called "Phase Two" is planned and begun as soon as possible.

"We still have work to do to secure funding for Phase Two of this project and I look forward to sitting down with our partners to get it done in a timely manner," McGraw said. "The medical and nursing schools are scheduled to open next fall, so fast-tracking the second phase of the project is of utmost importance to the region."

Morrison also praised ongoing cooperation and anticipated future cooperation.

"The days of a project coming to fruition without multiple players is almost history," he said. "Just a few years ago it was unheard of for county and city to join forces to rebuild a state

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- Williamson County Judge Dan Gattis on FM 1460

is a critical link to ensure safe access to it."

Birkinman said she is glad to see TxDOT funding the project because "it is a state road."

"When the state announced [previously] they could not fund FM 1460, the city of Round Rock, Williamson County and the private sector came together to fill a void left by the state," Morrison recalled. "Everyone knew something had to be done because the road cannot handle traffic as it exists today."

Daigh said construction will start next spring.

Gattis said work will take between 18 and 24 months to complete because the road will not be closed during construction.

Daigh - who recently said he did not know when or even if state money would be made available - went on to explain

1460 corridor the "epicenter of growth" for all of Williamson County.

Development is especially evident north of Old Settlers Boulevard, where the Round Rock Higher Education Center, Seton Medical Center Williamson and the Teravista subdivision are all clustered near the intersection of FM 1460 and University Boulevard.

Furthermore, the Texas A&M Health Science Center has broken ground on its medical school on FM 1460, just south of University Boulevard.

Also, Texas State University is building a nursing school at its campus near the intersection of FM 1460 and University Boulevard.

"I think that is right now the epicenter in the county for growth, with the medical center and the school and all that is happening on that," Gattis said. "To push through the economic growth, we've got to push through the road."

"The other issue is a safety issue. If we don't build it, it is going to cost lives."

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