

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

Birkman 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 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 ... 195 [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 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."

Gattis - a long-time 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.