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Hwy. 290 project to cause future business displacement

Multiple property relocations along corridor may be imminent

By John Rigg

The Hwy. 290 expansion project has entered the first phase of construction at the Loop 610 and I-10 interchange, which will widen Hwy. 290 up to W. 34th Street. Due to these improvements, property owners along the freeway and service roads may have to relocate to allow for required right-of-way acquisition as construction progresses, according to the Texas Department of Transportation's Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Property owners in several project

areas are expected to receive introductory notices by the end of the year. Once an offer is made to the property owner, TxDOT or the company hired to handle the acquisition sends letters to tenants within 10 days, according to TxDOT.

Phase two of construction will expand the corridor between W. 34th Street to Telge Road, while the final phase will end at FM 2920 in Waller County. The 38-mile project is being completed in segments and is expected to reach the area between the City of Jersey Village and Fairfield by 2014, said Raquelle Lewis, public information officer for TxDOT.

"Although I am concerned with the See **Expansion** | 19



The Hwy. 290 expansion project has displaced parking spaces at the Northwest Mall near Loop 610.

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Expansion

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short-term effects, my primary concern regarding the expansion relates to the more permanent consequences," said Mike Castro, Jersey Village city manager. "Primarily, the community is concerned with quality of life issues. We are also concerned with the loss of business sales tax revenue as properties and businesses are acquired to make way for the expansion."

Acquisition process

TxDOT's impact statement was approved by the Federal Highway Administration in August 2010 and breaks up the study area of affected properties into three sections—Hwy. 290, Hempstead Road and Loop 610—which leaves about 780 acres needed for additional right of way acquisition.

The project has displaced more than 30 businesses so far and could displace about 450 property owners in Northwest Houston, including 134 businesses, 87 single family homes, 225 multi-family homes, multiple storage units and several miles of pipeline and equipment, according to the impact statement.

TxDOT has implemented an acquisition and relocation assistance program to provide counseling to property owners required to relocate as a result of the Hwy. 290 expansion project.

Single-family residences that could be displaced are primarily in the Oak Forest and White Oak Falls neighborhoods. Popular businesses in the 15000 and 16000 blocks of Hwy. 290 near Jersey Village that may be displaced include Taco Bell, Wendy's, McDonalds and Chevron, according to the FEIS.

As the project moves forward,

eminent domain could be a concern for more than 800 property owners along Hwy. 290 if agreements are not made between TxDOT and business owners.

"It is important to stress eminent domain only defines the last stage of any right-of-way acquisition process and not every acquisition reaches that point," Lewis said. "The state will only acquire property through eminent domain when the property owner and the state cannot agree on a compensation value."

Relocation

Deal-Sikes & Associates, a real estate consultation and valuation firm, has represented property owners already displaced near the I-10 and Loop 610 interchange. The firm also assisted with right-of-way acquisition consultations during the I-10 expansion about 10 years ago, during which an estimated 1,067 properties were displaced along a 40-mile stretch from downtown Houston to the Brazos River Crossing.

"Impacted property owners have known about [the Hwy. 290] expansion for a couple years," said Mark Sikes, principle with Deal-Sikes and Associates. "The work we do [ensures] property owners receive 'just compensation' from the state. For instance, some shopping centers are losing a good amount of parking. These are aspects that may affect the rate of business. Our role is to determine what this compensation should be not only for what the government is taking, but the effect on the property."

The Antique Center of Texas had operated off Loop 610 at Old Katy Road for about 22 years when the owner was notified by the state of imminent right-of-way acquisition in mid-2010. Crossland Acquisition, a leading relocation firm specializing in right-of-way

issues, met with the co-owners several years before the project, said co-owner Rebecca Thompson.

After receiving a 90-day notice to vacate, the business moved to the former J.C. Penny building in the Northwest Mall in February, she said.

"We were eventually moved, but it was a long ordeal," Thompson said. "We basically had to set up a new business, and there were a lot of costs that weren't expected. The move was only one aspect. We had to complete the permits and address safety issues. We went to a public meeting about five years ago and would go to the Hwy. 290 Program office and speak to them directly on occasion. Businesses need to know who to contact."

Concerned property owners as far as the proposed Grand Parkway have contacted Deal-Sikes, said Matt Deal, firm principle.

Funding

Although the expansion of Hwy. 290 has been in the works for several years, TxDOT has had issues with available funding. Unlike the expansion of I-10—which had the necessary funding for right-of-way acquisition all at once—the Hwy. 290 expansion has faced funding challenges at the state level, Lewis said.

TxDOT is working on an agreement with the Harris County Toll Road Authority to provide funding to accelerate construction and start working on all three phases at the same time, Lewis said.

"Once this agreement is finalized, we will have a much clearer picture of when construction will begin and estimated completion," she said.

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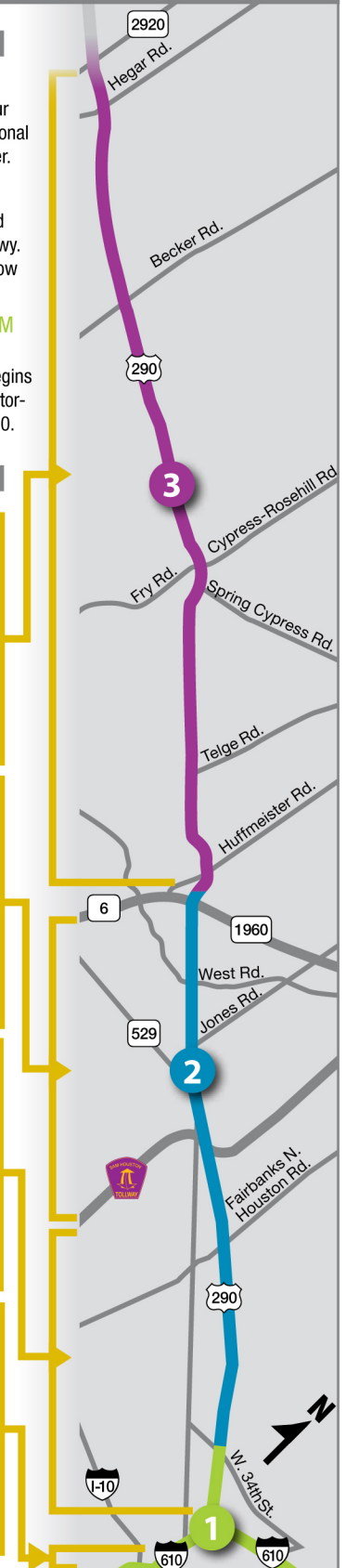
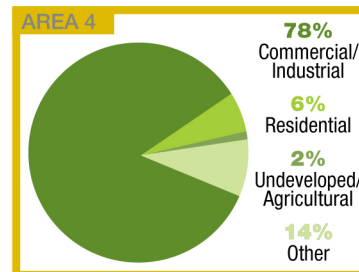
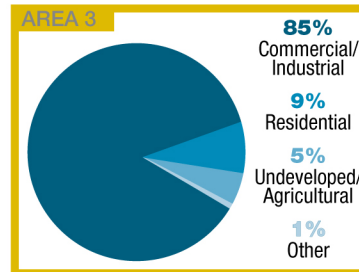
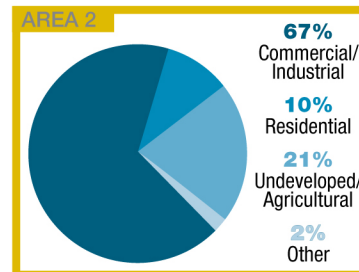
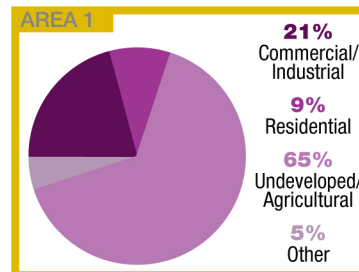
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DISPLACEMENT BREAKDOWN

HWY. 290 IMPROVEMENT PHASES

- 3 FM 1960 TO THE GRAND PARKWAY**
The interim plan will provide three to four non-tolled lanes each way and an additional two to three managed lanes in the center.
- 2 W. 34TH STREET TO FM 1960**
Continuous frontage roads and improved collector-distributor ramps along with Hwy. 290 expansion will allow better traffic flow along the corridor.
- 1 ADDING DIRECT CONNECTORS FROM HWY. 290 TO I-10**
Construction for the connecting ramp begins near W. 34th Street, which will allow motorists to access I-10 directly from Hwy. 290.

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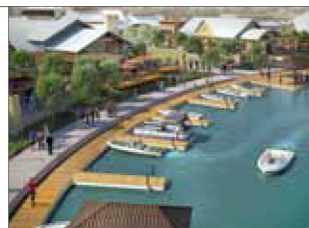


Source: TxDOT's FEIS



Higher Ed. Guide I 13

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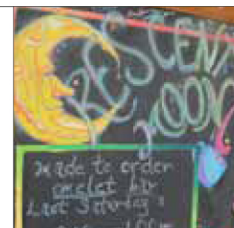


New grocery stores I 8

Several new grocery stores are under construction around Cy-Fair

Crescent Moon Cafe I 23

Owner brings New Orleans charm to Northwest Houston



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Whole Foods to open new store near Vintage Park

New 40,000-square-foot location to open by 2014