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July / August 2012

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## Highway 290 Expansion Project

### 'Unprecedented' Eminent Domain Play in NW Houston as Highway 290 Expansion Gears Up

The Texas Department of Transportation is acquiring 73.4 acres along Houston's West Loop near US Highway 290 for a massive freeway widening project that will transform the Northwest Corridor.

Much of TxDot's initial property acquisition has been centered on the west side of Interstate 610, just south of Highway 290.

"This unprecedented expansion of the West Loop is the most significant modification to Interstate 610 in years," said eminent domain expert Mark Sikes, principal with Deal Sikes & Associates, a Houston real estate valuation firm involved in many of the West Loop acquisitions. "The acquisition of this much West Loop frontage is an extremely rare and noteworthy property purchase that will lead to the expansion of US Highway 290 and a noticeable change in Houston traffic patterns."

Deal Sikes & Associates, a leading eminent domain consultant, is providing valuation counseling for a significant number of the land owners impacted by the West Loop North widening. Some 30 parcels, located primarily on the west side of Interstate 610, between the Katy Freeway and Highway 290, are in the process of being acquired by the state.

"We consider that there is significant disparity between market value and what TxDot has offered to pay for the West Loop frontage. We are working with the private property owners, ensuring they will receive a fair price from TxDot," said Sikes.

Sikes previously served as a consultant for the majority of commercial property owners contesting compensation amounts offered by the state in the Katy Freeway widening, prior to becoming the leading Highway 290 eminent domain consultant today.

Several well-known retail locations are being obtained for the West Loop North expansion, including the Antique Center of Texas building, the former Malibu Grand Prix entertainment center, and a portion of Macy's and Northwest Mall. The Antique Center has relocated to Northwest Mall, leasing 200,000 square feet that was formerly occupied by J.C. Penney.

The land acquisitions are part of the planned TxDot expansion to relieve traffic congestion on Highway 290 in northwest Houston.

As residential and commercial development has boomed in the northwest over the last decade, traffic issues have become acute. Growth is expected to continue. Population in the US 290 corridor is expected to increase from a current total of 543,000 to 888,000 by 2035.

TxDot and Harris County have approved an initial agreement for the widening of U.S. 290 from Loop 610 to the Grand Parkway by building

two or three reversible managed lanes for high-occupancy vehicles and toll-paying traffic. Two more general lanes will be built, one lane on either side. Construction of the \$1.3 billion project is expected to start next year. The project may take six years to complete.

"Those of us in the northwest Houston area hope the U.S. 290 project will mirror the success of the Katy Freeway reconstruction, another joint project between government entities," said Peter Houghton, vice president with the Bridgeland master-planned community on the northwest side.

Old Hempstead Road from east of Washington Avenue to west of Beltway 8 is being repaired and upgraded so the thoroughfare can serve as a detour route during the U.S. 290 construction.

*Ralph Bivens, former president of the National Association of Real Estate Editors, is founding editor of RealtyNewsReport.com.*

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