

SH45 construction revs up

BY JEN BIUNDO

jen@haysfreepress.com

Work is revving up on State Highway 45 Southeast, the toll road currently under construction through Creedmoor just north of Hays County.

SH 45 SE will connect IH-35 to the future SH 130, hugging the path of the existing FM 1327.

In April, the state awarded the \$140 million contract to Balfour Beatty Infrastructure, Inc. and T.J. Lambrecht Construction, Inc. Construction began this summer, and the road is slated to be open in early 2009.

The new road will lay its tracks through previously untouched ranchland, and

the new infrastructure may open northeastern Hays County to commercial development. Turnersville Road, a main artery of the 2,800-acre Sunfield development currently under construction east of Buda, will hook into the toll road and offer access west to IH-35 or east to US 183 and the airport.

John Nevares, Assistant Area Engineer for the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT), said the scale of the intersection would be similar to that of US 290 overpass at IH-35.

"It's almost like a T-intersection, with three direct-connect bridges that tie into the interstate," Nevares said.

See **SH45 CONSTRUCTION**, pg. 6A

"You don't have to worry about IH-35 access roads. It's going to merge you right onto the main lanes."

Meanwhile, Nevares said, SH 45 SE would follow the aesthetic design package created for SH 130.

"On the other portions of the toll road we've done a dark tan paint job with light cream accents, and used the star of Texas to highlight some areas," said TxDOT spokesperson Marcus Cooper. "We always take into account local concerns, as far as aesthetics go."

The 7.4-mile road will be four lanes wide, with controlled access and a wide center median. While most area toll roads are designed with free access roads, the parallel FM 1327 will serve that purpose for SH 45 SE.

Phase I interchanges are slated for IH-3535, North Turnersville Road, FM 1625, and State Highway 130/US 183. A future interchange is planned at Wright Road.

Tolls are expected to run between 12 and 17 cents per mile.

The western-most toll booth is planned near the Turnersville Road intersection, but motorists will be able to travel between the interstate and Turnersville Road without paying a toll.

Contractors will demolish the existing FM 1327 bridge. The Onion Creek exit has been closed since October, and is expected to remain closed through next year. Nevares said more lane closures were on the way, but most interstate closures would occur during the night.

"We're going to have to divert traffic onto the frontage road, we are going to have to close lanes for any type of pavement work done on the main lanes," Nevares said. "But I don't foresee the contractors closing the main lanes during the day unless it's an emergency."

Nevares urged motorists to keep an eye out for signs along the interstate announcing lane closures.

"Be patient with us," Nevares said. "We're trying to get this done as quickly as we can."