

Trailing along

Mockingbird Pedestrian Bridge, trail connections a work in progress

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The city of Dallas has a growing number of hike and bike trails, but many remain disconnected from one another.

That's about to change.

Last summer, former City Councilwoman Angela Hunt broke ground on the Mockingbird Pedestrian Bridge. The cantilevered suspension bridge will cross Mockingbird Lane, connecting the Katy Trail to the Mockingbird DART Station via a trail extension and the Twin Sixties bridge. From there, another extension will run to the White Rock Creek and SoPac Trails.

"Connecting the trails is actually my first priority, because I have a hard time understanding how anyone can think there's a better priority than trails," said councilman Philip Kingston, who represents District 14. "Sometimes there's not a good reason to explain why these projects take so long."

The bridge over Mockingbird Lane needed a special design because it sits atop a DART tunnel, said Chiamin Kormgiebel, senior program manager with the city of Dallas Public Works Department.

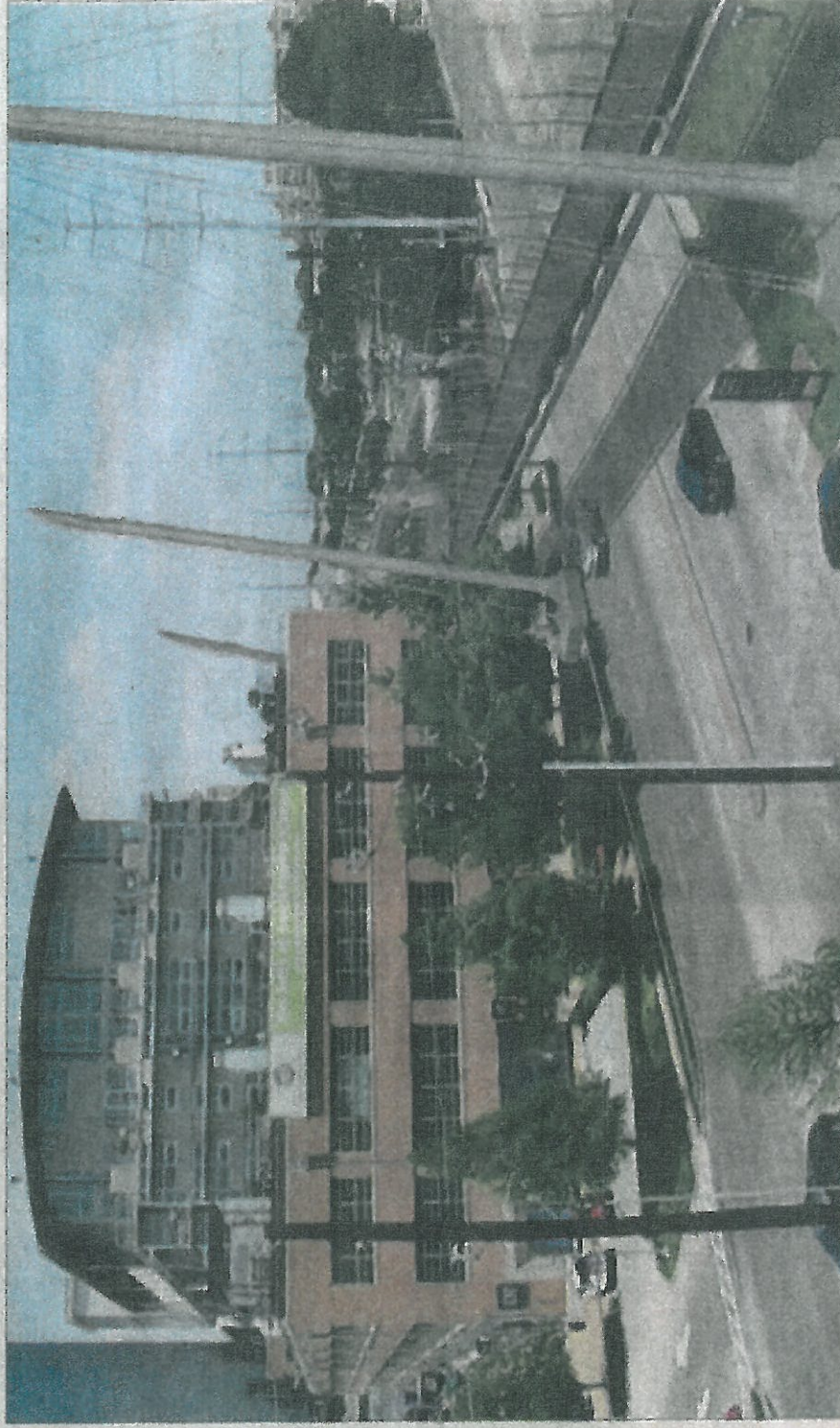
"We had to push the foundations away from the tunnel," Kormgiebel said. "It's going to look very unique."

And, she said, it will be unique to build, too.

"We have to build a temporary frame across the roadway on each side and then build the bridge. When we tighten the suspension that's when we remove the frame," Kormgiebel said.

Work on the bridge was expected to begin this year and to finish in 2015. Because of complications in securing the easements needed to construct it, Kormgiebel said the completion date will now be spring or summer 2016.

"We should be advertising for construction probably in the fall," she said. It will take about 15 months to complete. The project, which includes the Twin Sixties



File photo

An artist's rendering shows how the Katy Trail pedestrian bridge will cross Mockingbird Lane near Central Expressway.

Pedestrian Bridge, will cost an estimated \$14.1 million.

But while the bridge itself is off to a slow start, other portions of the Katy Trail extension project continue to move forward.

"Once we finish all of these extensions, we will connect all of the system, and the White Rock Lake will be the hub," Kormgiebel said.

Building in phases

The trails are being built in pieces. Once connected, they will run from the Katy Trail to the SoPac Trail in the north, and to the White Rock Creek, White Rock Lake and Santa Fe trails to the southeast.

"You're going to wind up with an off-street system where you don't stand even the slightest chance of being hit by a car and see parts of town that you can't see from the roads," Kingston said.

While many of the trails branch off existing ones, the names are often different, Korm-

giebel said.

"In my mind, it's all the Katy Trail, one piece," she said. "[But], especially in their neighborhood, they just want something with their name."

Which is why, she said, you'll see the Ridgewood Trail running to Flag Pole Hill, where residents have asked for a name change to the Flag Pole Hill Trail, but probably not any more Trinity or Santa Fe trails.

"I'm in favor of a moratorium of using the words Trinity or Santa Fe in the name of a trail," Kingston said.

For most of the completed trails, there is a corresponding organization dedicated to helping with its upkeep. Each group oversees its section of the trail, but all are excited about what an interconnected system has to offer.

Baldock said safety for trail users is the No. 1 priority for the Friends of the Katy Trail and that a trail system allows a place to ex-

ercise, as well as commuting or entertainment options.

For the Love of the Lake, a nonprofit that works to keep up White Rock Lake, is also concerned with safety along the trails.

Lis Akin, the group's executive director, said people should think of the trails as a road for pedestrians, cyclists and runners.

"As with anything, as you tie in more to different trails and such it is going to increase traffic," Akin said. "This trail expansion — it's going to be increasing just that much more. You can ride in on your bike, you can also take the DART rail to White Rock Station ... Coming off the lake, you could easily get to Deep Ellum."

East Dallas cyclists and runners can already get to Deep Ellum via the Santa Fe Trail, which connects to the White Rock Lake Trail. But it isn't a trail system yet, said Lawrence Mendive, chairman of the board for the Friends of the Santa Fe Trail.

"I love doing the trail, and I love all about it, but I want them to connect," Mendive said.

Mendive said he'd like to see all of the trail groups and their councilmembers sit down and talk about ways to improve the system and speed up the connections.

"I think all the trails people are all on board with getting this connected ... the connection is an important thing," he said. "Part of the whole selling Dallas process is these great trails, where people can get around. The trail system in 20-25 years is going to be a way to get around."

And that, Akin said, is a good thing.

"Anything that's going to increase the value and get more people recreating is good for not just the park, but the population as well," Akin said.

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