



DEVELOPMENT PLANS ALONG NEW I-40 STALL

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When Kirk and Grant Humphreys bought the former downtown airpark along Western Avenue a few years ago, they stood alone in announcing intentions to create a new commercial development along the realigned Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway.

Drawings of “The Waterfront” released in early 2009 showed the development along Western Avenue, the new I-40 and the Oklahoma River would consist of hotels, restaurants, housing and shops. Grant Humphreys even bought a Ferris wheel from the Santa Monica Pier via eBay for the development.

But with the highway set to open in 2012, the father and son are focused on a housing development at Lake Eufaula, and they are taking a wait-and-see approach before proceeding with the airpark.

“Right now it looks like everything is dead in the water,” Kirk Humphreys said. “But right now the highway is dead in the water — it’s not usable — yet. But it’s always darkest before the dawn. Successful business people invest when others are selling and sell when everyone else is buying.”

Cathy O’Connor, president of the newly formed Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City, sees similar sentiment throughout the community.

“I’m not hearing anything definitive currently,” O’Connor said. “There are



The vision for The Waterfront, a mixed-use development on the former site of the Downtown Airpark, remains in place but may not start as soon as originally hoped.

IMAGE PROVIDED



Kirk Humphreys
Developer of The Waterfront

a few people thinking about it. Along the new I-40 we will have a full interchange at Western, and then a divided full intersection at Robinson and



Cathy O’Connor
President of the Alliance for Economic Development of Oklahoma City

Shields. And those are the areas where we see potential for commercial development.” O’Connor notes devel-

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KIRK HUMPHREYS

opment along much of the new highway won’t be easy. Much of it involves publicly owned land between the highway and the Oklahoma River. Part of the highway will be depressed into the ground, and not all areas will enjoy

frontage road access.

Humphreys believes development interest likely will pick up in 2013 if current economic conditions continue or improve both locally and nationwide.

“Our market here in Oklahoma City is probably

better than anywhere in the country,” Humphreys said. “We have low unemployment. Our housing industry has among the best resiliency. ... Rental housing is working, especially downtown. Owner-occupied housing is working, but relatively moderately priced — \$225,000 and down — those guys are doing well.”

The biggest key to highway development, Humphreys added, may be the 2012 presidential election.

“When the highway finishes, I think you may see a better development market by then,” Humphreys said. “If the federal government calms down — there is a lot of money sitting on the sidelines right now.”

Current Crosstown Expressway has safety issue history

BY BRANDON GOODWIN
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A bridge is not something motorists want to see through.

Yet that is a regular occurrence on the Interstate 40 Crosstown Expressway, a two-mile elevated highway through Oklahoma City that frequently drops coffee table-sized chunks of concrete from its deck, exposing naked rebar and the ground below.

Emergency crews rush to the bridge to repair these holes about 20 times a year, creating a quilt of patches designed to keep the bridge usable until it is replaced with a new section of highway next summer.

For years, motorists have raised concerns about the integrity of the expressway.

Oklahoma Transportation Department officials said the bridge has regular inspections and is safe.

“If there was any indication that the condition of the bridge was dangerous,



Construction crews shape the barrier wall Friday between the lanes of the I-40 Crosstown Expressway project.

PHOTO BY DAVID MCDANIEL, THE OKLAHOMAN

we would not have traffic on the bridge.” Division Engineer Paul Green said.

But concerns about the bridge go deeper than its surface.

The structure’s support beams are known as “fracture critical,” an outdated design technique that

means if one support beam fails, the entire bridge section could collapse.

The I-35W bridge that collapsed in Minneapolis, Minn., in 2007, killing 13 people, was a fracture-critical structure.

Field Construction Engineer Anthony Echelle

said the Crosstown Expressway bridge has 300 fracture critical points.

It was built to modern design standards when it opened in 1966, but this type of structural design was thrown out in the 1970s in favor of designs that offer secondary sup-

ONLINE

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port beams.

The last incident concerning a fracture critical point on the Crosstown was in 1989.

Inspectors found the spot before it failed and closed the bridge until it was repaired.

Regular inspections also report corrosion and rusted beams.

Officials said issues concerning the safety of the bridge are addressed.

Other issues are deferred since the bridge’s days are numbered.

“We are doing everything to see that it is safe,” said Terri Angier, spokeswoman for the Oklahoma Transportation Department. “But not past the point of wasting taxpayer dollars.”

The structure will be replaced by a new section of Interstate 40 next summer that will be five blocks south of the current expressway.

The state spends more than \$1 million a year on preventive maintenance of the roadway, Echelle said.

Costs of spot maintenance are cheaper than projected costs to rereck the bridge. Additionally, the major impact to traffic to overhaul a bridge that will close in a year is not necessary, Echelle said.

Some of the degradation of the bridge comes from high amounts of traffic. Currently, the bridge carries about 120,000 vehicles a day, 50,000 more than it was designed for.

The bridge also lacks shoulders, and offers little merging room.

“If you have a flat tire, there is little room to pull over and have car trouble,” Echelle said.

“That’s just another reason why we are eager to get traffic off that old bridge,” he said.

November 1989

A cracked support beam on a portion of the Crosstown closes a large section of eastbound I-40.



January 1996

A Citizens Advisory Committee and Technical Advisory Committee is formed. The first public meeting is held to discuss relocating the Crosstown.

July 1996

Seven new potential routes are developed, along with an option not to build a new Crosstown Expressway.



February 2000

Oklahoma City completes a land use and mitigation plan for the project. The state Transportation Department incorporates retaining walls and a pedestrian bridge between Walker and Hudson avenues into the construction plan and commits to creating a nearby park.

At left is a scale model of the relocated I-40 Crosstown Expressway shown during a public hearing in 2001.

May 2002

Environmental clearance for the project is received.

March 2003

First property is cleared.

April 2004

Final design work begins.

November 2005

Construction begins.

October 2008

Partner Design Partnership beats out three other teams for the chance to design the pedestrian bridge, SkyDance Bridge, over I-40. The bridge is inspired by the “skydance” of the state bird, the scissor-tailed flycatcher.

May 2009

The Surface Transportation Board, a federal agency, authorizes the relocation of an Oklahoma City railway line that lies in the path of the I-40 Crosstown Expressway project.

August 2010

The state Transportation Commission approves the first paving contract for the Crosstown relocation.

June 2011

Construction of the Skydance Bridge is set to begin in August.

2012
The new Crosstown Expressway is slated to open by mid-2012.

