

The Dallas Morning News

June 2, 2008

Dallas County commissioners to discuss southern development

By Kevin Krause

Dallas County commissioners Tuesday morning will discuss taking part in a major plan for aiding development in the southern part of the county, where growth has been exploding around a rail hub and busy trade center.

The county's inland port is "perhaps the greatest economic development opportunity remaining" in the county, according to a commissioners' briefing for Tuesday's meeting.

The problem is that the area south of Interstate 20 is lacking basic infrastructure, such as roads and water and sewer lines. And small cities, like Wilmer and Hutchins that sit in the middle of the development, lack the money and expertise to help fulfill those needs, county officials said.

Without a comprehensive plan for the area, development will be random, piecemeal and of a lesser quality, according to the briefing to commissioners.

With its easy access to three interstate highways, the 6,000-acre Dallas Logistics Hub has become a magnet for development. It can accommodate 60 million square feet of commercial space, and several warehouses and distribution centers are already in operation, with many more planned.

Union Pacific has a major rail operation near the hub, and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp. recently bought almost 200 acres nearby. BNSF, the nation's second largest railroad, is expected to open an intermodal terminal like Union Pacific's where freight containers are loaded and unloaded from trains.

Commissioners are expected to discuss whether the county should help pay for the comprehensive plan, which will identify the area's infrastructure needs and provide a framework for building it.

The project is estimated to cost \$902,000. Under the proposal, the bulk of it would be split among the North Central Texas Council of Governments, the city of Dallas and the county — with each chipping in \$290,000. It is expected to be completed by April 2010.

About one-third of the area being studied is in unincorporated Dallas County. It includes some of Dallas as well as Wilmer, Hutchins and Lancaster.

According to the briefing, a seven-member oversight committee would include representatives from those four cities, the council of governments and Dallas County.

The committee would select a consultant to help with the project. The council of governments would develop population, housing and employment projections, as well as labor, transportation and economic base studies.

County commissioners are not scheduled to vote on it Tuesday.