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City moving ahead with plans to build bridge to rail yard Hutchins: Council letter seeks county's support but says it isn't needed

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Last month, Dallas County Commissioner John Wiley Price told Hutchins city officials that he wouldn't support the release of regional transportation funds to help build a bridge to the important Union Pacific rail yard.

This week, Hutchins gave its response: So what?

The Hutchins City Council on Monday told Mayor Artis Johnson that it supported him sending Mr. Price a letter giving the county a July 31 deadline to participate in the project. If the county declines, the city will proceed anyway.

"We just want to build a bridge," Mr. Johnson said in the letter. "Except for Dallas County, all involved parties are prepared to move forward with making this project a reality, including the agencies with the necessary funding. Staff support from the county would be greatly appreciated. In particular, your support of the project is of the utmost importance to the city of Hutchins and the region."

Mr. Price said he objects to the project because The Allen Group - a California-based company that owns several thousand acres in the area - hasn't displayed solid evidence that it will hire an adequate number of locally owned minority companies. The Allen Group is paying for the design of the bridge, which will roughly form the northern boundary of the Union Pacific facility.

The commissioner, whose district includes Hutchins, said that he wouldn't be pressured into making a decision.

"Unfortunately, it's short-sighted. They're talking about building a bridge. I'm talking about policy," Mr. Price said. While he acknowledged the bridge could be built without his approval, he cautioned that it is not the only project Hutchins may need.

"There are a lot of other things that go with the bridge," he said. "Historically, Hutchins hasn't had the wherewithal to do those things. The county and my road and bridge crew have been more than generous in terms of trying to assist them."

Richard Allen, chief executive officer of The Allen Group, said his company has tried to provide all the information the commissioner has asked for.

"I don't know what else we can do," Mr. Allen said. He said the three finalists for the design work have minority representation. In addition, he said, his company has a minority hiring program.

"That information is in the commissioner's hands," he said. "We're glad that communities are coming together for the bridge, because it's critical for the region."

Mr. Price had volunteered the county to serve as project manager for the \$5 million bridge project. The North Central Texas Council of Governments' Regional Transportation Council is holding the \$5 million in funding. The council had agreed to keep the money until Mr. Price had time to have his concerns addressed.

Mr. Johnson said U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, D-Dallas, and Lancaster officials met with Hutchins officials this month to offer assurances that the project would get done. Mr. Johnson told the City Council that Lancaster offered to replace the county as project manager.

www.allengroup.com



In a prepared statement, Ms. Johnson said she wanted the bridge completed soon.

"The proposed grade separation bridge project at Wintergreen Road is an imperative for increased public safety, efficient operation of the area's transportation system, and economic development around the new intermodal facility," Ms. Johnson said. "Each day the project is delayed, we lose an opportunity for much needed job creation in an economically depressed area."

Southern Dallas County is experiencing a surge in economic development.

Union Pacific built the \$100million, 350-acre intermodal rail facility where containers from trains are unloaded onto trucks and shipped nationwide.

Area officials have said Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroad could build a similar facility. In addition to The Allen Group, developers such as ProLogis, Argent and Duke Realty are planning distribution-warehouse centers.

Mr. Johnson said not having the bridge creates hardships for Hutchins residents, many of whom live on the west side of the intermodal facility. He said emergency vehicles sometimes have to travel several miles north to get around the rail yard.