

TRINITY PARKWAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

by Angela Hunt and Rep. Rafael Anchia

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Larry Beasley, leader of the “Dream Team” whose report was presented to the City Council in April of 2015, has stated that “the park is the client” and that the parkway must be designed to serve the park. We completely endorse this perspective and firmly agree with these key principles.¹

Therefore, the single most critical priority for the proposed road must be that it is, in fact, a true parkway and that it looks, functions, and feels like a true parkway (not a high speed highway labeled as a parkway). A true parkway must meet two criteria — it must provide effective visual and physical access to the park and, equally important, its engineering and design must not be detrimental to the character of the park nor to the enjoyment of citizens and visitors using that park.

One of the most important factors in determining the true character of the road is its speed, considered both as design speed and posted speed. Speed on a road is determined not just by speed limit signs but by the design geometry of the road. This geometry includes a number of factors — lane widths, curves, curbs and shoulders, acceleration/deceleration lanes (if any), location and spacing of trees, and more.

The Technical Team reports that their design has resulted in a de facto design speed of 45 mph. However, after much research and discussion with city staff and consultants, it is clear

¹ For that reason, we believe it would have been more appropriate to undertake any redesign of the Trinity Park prior to redesigning the road. That way, that the road could actually be designed to accommodate park elements. Although that was not accomplished, we believe the underlying philosophy of “putting the park first” must be the lens through which the Technical Design is evaluated.

to us that several aspects of the current road design will allow speeds much higher than 45 mph. Since we believe there will always be the possibility of speed “creep” throughout this project and that only the geometrics of the road will keep that from happening, we feel strongly that the physical parameters of the road must be such as to clearly restrain speed now and in the future.

In particular, we are concerned about the radii of the meanders, the lengths of acceleration and deceleration lanes, the width of the travel lanes, the quality of the shoulders, and the location of the trees.

As shown in the 35% design drawings, the radii of the meanders are much larger — almost twice as much — than is required for a 45 mph road. The lengths of the acceleration and deceleration lanes — up to 1,000 feet — are several times the length needed for a 45 mph road. The travel lanes have been expanded to typical highway widths. The gravel shoulders will encourage higher travel speeds than grass shoulders. And the proposed trees are located much too far from the road to be effective at reducing actual driving speeds.

It is our recommendation that each of these critical factors (and others) be re-visited *now*, prior to moving ahead to the 65% design milestone. They should be adjusted so that Dallasites of today — elected and appointed officials and citizens — have confidence that the proposed road design will clearly restrain speed now and in the future. It should be noted that the highly praised April Charrette Report illustrated a road with exactly these characteristics — tighter meanders, narrow lanes, near-non-existent acceleration/deceleration lanes, grass shoulders, tree location closer to the road, and more.

We are — at this 35% design milestone — at a critical juncture in the process of re-envisioning the road, and it is vitally important to get these fundamentals right before moving ahead to 65%. First, it is critical that the public be actively engaged in this process. Second, there must be an ongoing Citizen’s Oversight Committee to ensure that the Charrette vision is not compromised in any way as the road design is refined now, and as it advances through future design stages. The committee must have the authority to call a stop to the work and bring the matter back to the City Council until any concerns they raise are adequately addressed.

Finally, we acknowledge the fervent desire of some to avoid invoking a NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) review or a reopening of the Records of Decision (RODs). However, it should be noted that a great many of the Technical Team’s recommendations already raise both possibilities, and that there is no guarantee whatsoever — by any party or agency — that the Charrette vision can be achieved without doing so.

As stated in our opening paragraph, we remain in concurrence with the key principles that “the park is the client” and that the parkway must be designed to serve the park. If achievement of these principles requires revisiting the RODs or undertaking a NEPA review, we believe this is acceptable if the end result is a great Trinity Park — supported by a true parkway — for the citizens of Dallas.

SPEED

Of all the factors discussed, the speed of vehicular traffic on the parkway will be the primary determinant of whether it is fundamentally compatible with the Trinity Park. There will be considerable pressure to raise the speed limit on the parkway, both to increase the financial productivity of the toll road and to respond to drivers' preference for a quick bypass of downtown. It is our conclusion that a moderate speed of 35 mph is appropriate for the park setting.

While the Dream Team's Charrette Report purported to be "neutral" on the matter of posted speed², a low-speed roadway is the only facility that accommodates the Charrette Vision which mandates meanders, narrow lanes, grass shoulders, and virtually non-existent deceleration/acceleration lanes for pull-off areas. As explained more fully below, the Technical Design deviates from each of these critical factors that constrain the speed of the road:

Meanders Have Been Straightened, Enabling Higher Speeds

The meanders proposed in the Charrette Vision are the most prominent physical characteristic constraining the speed of the road. Tighter curves require drivers to maintain a lower speed, which is more appropriate to a park setting. The Technical Design has straightened the meanders, thus allowing for higher travel speeds.

Although the Technical Design's meanders ostensibly result in a design speed of 45 mph, further investigation of the geometry of the curves indicates that they would actually support much higher speeds. A design speed of 45 mph correlates with a curve radius of 1039 feet,³ yet the radii of most of the curves in the Technical Design are 2000 feet or more.⁴ To put this in perspective, a low-speed park-adjacent road like Turtle Creek Parkway has meanders with an average radius of 400 feet, resulting in a posted speed limit of 30 mph.

² During the Charrette, several members of the Dream Team argued that the design speed should be no more than 35 miles per hour; however, the majority view was not to endorse a specific speed, but instead to address design elements. *Charrette Report*, p. 15.

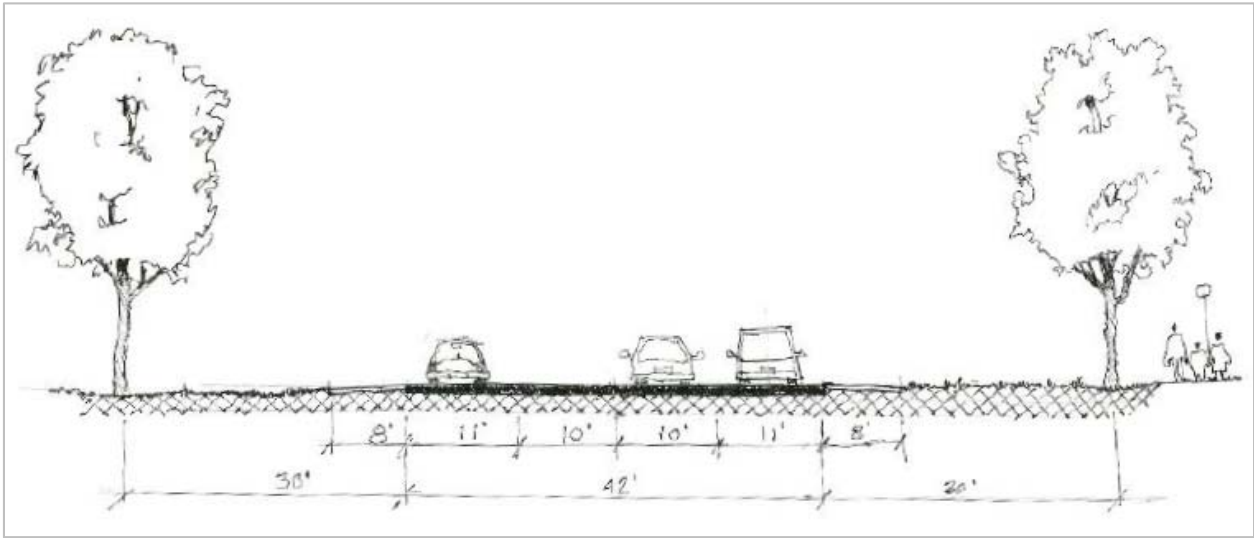
³ *Roadway Design Manual*, p. 2-14, Table 2-5, Texas Department of Transportation.

⁴ The radii of the meanders in the Technical Design are as follows: Set 1: Tangent - 2,000'; Set 2: 2,000' - 2,000'; Set 3: 1,750' - 1,600'; Set 4: 4,500' - 2,000'; Set 5: Tangent - 3,350'; Set 6: 2,000' - 2,000'; Set 7: 2,000' - 1,800'.

RECOMMENDATION: Direct the Technical Design Team to revise the meanders to reflect an anticipated 85th percentile speed of 40 mph and a posted speed of 35 mph.

Narrow Lanes Have Been Widened to Typical Highway Width

Narrow lanes constrain speed while wider travel lanes are correlated with higher vehicle speeds.⁵ The Charrette Vision showed roadway lanes with widths of 10 and 11 feet, with 42 feet of total pavement:



Charette Report Presentation p. 50

In the Technical Design, however, the lanes grew to 11 and 12 feet, plus 2 more feet of pavement between the road and the shoulder, resulting in 50 feet of pavement. These widths are indicative of highways and other high-speed roads appropriate for trucks, not a park access road.⁶

RECOMMENDATION: Direct the Technical Design Team to design the road as presented in the Charrette Vision, with 10 and 11 foot lanes, and without the additional 2 feet of pavement.

⁵ *Urban Street Design Guide*, "Lane Widths," National Association of City Transportation Officials, <http://nacto.org/publication/urban-street-design-guide/>.

⁶ *Id.*

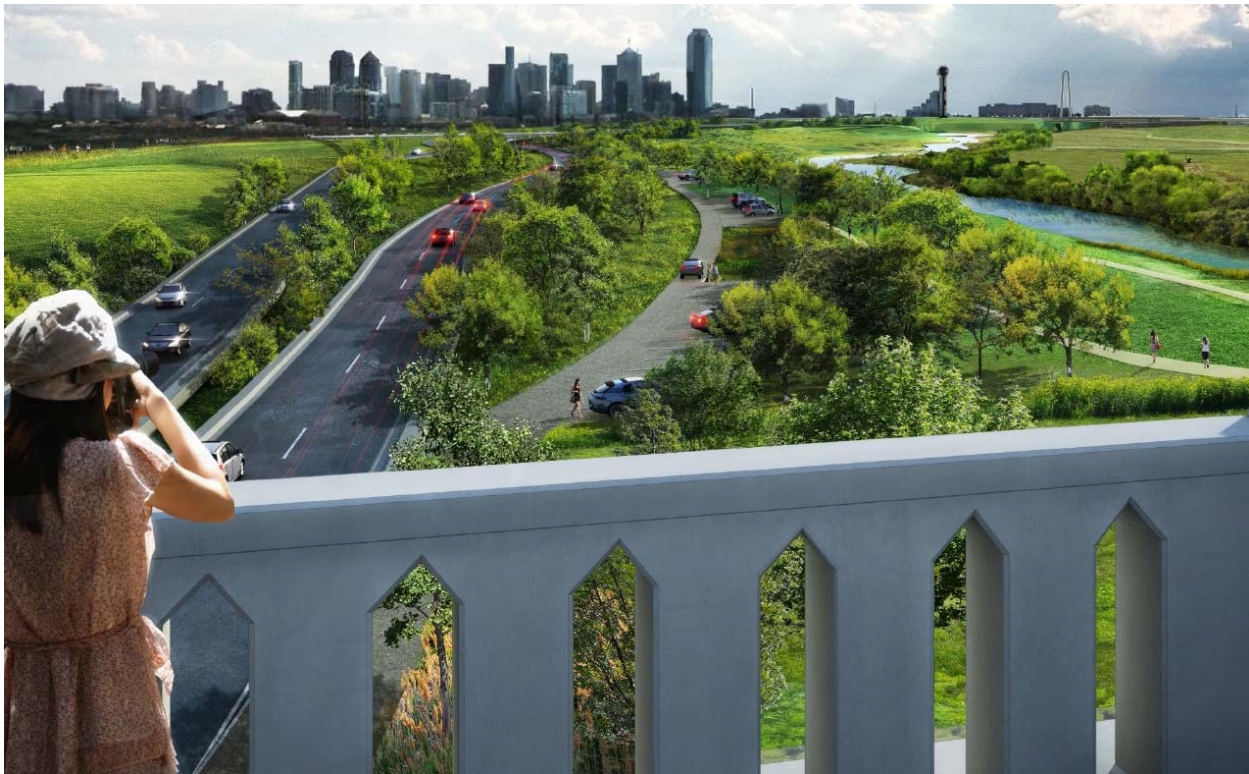
Grass Shoulders Have Been Eliminated

The Charrette Vision provided for grass shoulders, which are not only more appropriate for a parkway, but also encourage lower travel speeds. The Technical Design replaced the grass shoulders with gravel or asphalt. This additional hard surface will enable higher speeds and reduce the park-like nature of the road.

RECOMMENDATION: *Direct the Technical Design Team to include grass shoulders, as provided in the Charrette Vision.*

Highway-Length Acceleration/Deceleration Lanes Have Been Added

The primary image for the Charrette Vision indicated that pull-off areas were immediately adjacent to the roadway:



Charrette Report Presentation p. 31

The Technical Design instead proposes long deceleration and acceleration lanes into and out of the parking areas.⁷ If the parkway is intended to be a low-speed, park access road, large deceleration and acceleration lanes are unnecessary. Entry to park access areas should be perpendicular or near-perpendicular to the parkway as in typical park settings.⁸

RECOMMENDATION: *Direct the Technical Design Team to stay true to the Charrette Vision and eliminate deceleration and acceleration lanes.*

PARKWAY TREES

The Charrette presentation and Report proposed a tree-lined parkway with trees planted in a dense configuration close to the roadway.⁹ This not only creates a more pleasant driving experience, but impacts safety by encouraging lower driving speeds. While the Technical Report indicates that trees will be spaced at 20' to 40' centers, we have received conflicting information regarding the distance of the trees from the road. For urban streets with a speed of 45 mph or less, trees may be placed as close as 4' to 6' from the inside median, and 10' to 12' from the outside curb. We endorse such a configuration for the parkway.

RECOMMENDATION: *Direct the Technical Design to retain the density of the trees at 20' to 40' centers, and plant them 4' to 6' from the inside median, and 10' to 12' from the outside curb.*

PARKWAY FLOODWALL

The Charrette Vision proposed that the floodwall separating the roadway from the park be designed at a relatively low flood protection level — the 10-year flood standard — which would result in a 16-foot tall wall along the northern boundary of the park.¹⁰ The Technical

⁷ The Technical Design's deceleration lanes are 500' in length, while the acceleration lanes are 580', 1,000', 760', 610', and 560'.

⁸ For example, access to White Rock Lake Dog Park from Mockingbird Lane — a six-lane divided roadway with a posted speed of 40 mph — is nearly perpendicular. Likewise, there is perpendicular access to E. Lawther Dr. (a White Rock Lake park road) from Northwest Highway — a six-lane divided roadway with a posted speed of 45 mph.

⁹ *Charrette Report*, pp. 21, 25, 30.

¹⁰ There is a distinction between flood protection of the levees, which is a 1500-year protection, and flood protection of the road. The more flood protection that is provided for the road, the higher the flood walls. When

Design proposes floodwalls designed to the 100-year flood level, producing a 23-foot tall floodwall. The wall will run continuously along the northern boundary of the park for 2.25 miles. Regardless of whether it is 16 feet or 23 feet tall, this massive concrete structure is an unacceptable intrusion into the park that will damage the natural surroundings and adversely impact enjoyment of the park. This does not “put the park first.”

The Beasley Team has proposed berming the wall to hide the concrete. This is the only possibly acceptable course of action. It has been noted that berming may trigger additional federal review, and we strongly endorse whatever reviews or evaluations are necessary to ensure that this floodwall, which is designed solely for the toll road, does not negatively impact the park.

RECOMMENDATION: *Direct the Technical Design to return to the Charrette Vision of a floodwall designed to the 10-year flood level and obtain any federal approvals necessary to allow berming of the entire structure from the park side.*

RECORDS OF DECISION

Several crucial design elements presented in the Charrette Vision and Technical Design may trigger a NEPA review, necessitate changes to the Records of Decision (“RODs”), or require new RODs. These design features include reducing the number of lanes to four, eliminating several massive entry and exit ramps, adding trees along the roadway, reducing the height of the road’s floodwall, berming the park-side floodwall, and banning trucks. These features are central to the realization of the Charrette Vision.¹¹ In addition, the RODs are predicated on the full build-out of Alternative 3C. Larry Beasley informed the Committee that traffic analysis reviewed by the Dream Team proves that the additional capacity provided by Alternative 3C is not needed for at least twenty to thirty years, if ever.

the flood standard of the road is reduced, the size of the flood wall is reduced resulting in more contextual integration with the natural environment.

¹¹ We were disappointed that after nearly a year, it remains unknown whether or not the many design changes proposed in the Charrette Vision and resulting Technical Design will be permitted under the current Records of Decision. In one sense, there is no real parkway design for us to evaluate, since we do not yet know whether the most fundamental characteristics that improve upon the design of the Trinity Parkway are even possible.

Because so many critical design elements may trigger new federal approvals, and because Alternative 3C is not necessary, we recommend that the Council withdraw Alternative 3C as the locally preferred alternative and seek any necessary federal approvals predicated on the a four-lane, 35 mph, park access road as set forth in the Charrette Vision.

RECOMMENDATION: *Withdraw Alternative 3C as the locally preferred alternative. Approve the submission of any necessary NEPA reviews, amendments to the RODs, or requests for new RODs to ensure the Technical Design remains consistent with the Charrette Vision.*

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT, OVERSIGHT, and TRANSPARENCY

We strongly urge the Council to inform and consult the public on this project. Too much of this project has been undertaken behind closed doors. The original design Charrette, the efforts of the technical working group, even the work of this Committee, have deliberately excluded the public. Public input and involvement will not only improve the project but will also encourage public trust. The Technical Design should be presented to the public and modified in response to public comment.

The Charrette Report recognized that the Balanced Vision Plan had been undermined by the lack of citizen involvement, oversight, and transparency. Its specific recommendation to counter a repetition of that failure was to appoint a robust citizen oversight committee. To this point, no such committee has been created. To ensure the Technical Design remains true to the Charrette Vision, we support the creation of a citizens' oversight group, as originally suggested in the Charrette Report, to monitor the ongoing design of the parkway.

RECOMMENDATION: *Immediately release to the public all of the recorded deliberations of the Trinity Parkway Advisory Committee, all design work and related work product of the Charrette group and city staff, and all data relied on by those groups. Present the Technical Design to the public and invite public comment. Form a citizens' oversight group to monitor the parkway design process at every stage. Endow the group with the authority to halt the design process and return the project to the Council if the Technical Design deviates from the Charrette Vision.*