**How Elevated Highways Have Hurt the City of Dallas**

**For all of the talk about the Texas miracle, there has been one big loser: Dallas.**

Shocking, right? Yet every metric shows our urban core in decline. Our tax base shows weakness. We’re losing jobs. Household income is down. Property taxes are up.

How did this happen?

There are a number of explanations, but near the top of the list are the highways that cut through the center of our urban core. These highways, created for truckers and commuters in the 1960s, destroyed Dallas neighborhoods, wiped out local commerce, and left in their wake empty lots, filled with detritus. In the 1960s, roughly 60 percent of the region’s population resided in Dallas. Dallas was the region. Today the city houses only 17 percent of the total population.

**Dallas’ voice is muted in the matter. So is yours. So is the Mayor’s. So is the City Council’s. All these decisions come from bureaucrats, who have all but ignored local interests over the years.**

**So here’s the rub: Local leadership, going back to Mayor Erik Jonsson, has tried to prevent highways from being built through our city, but to no avail.**
That’s because there is no process in place to stop the process. All these decisions come from bureaucrats, who have all but ignored local interests over the years. They hold perfunctory town-hall meetings, hear out local citizens and leaders, and then charge ahead—building and repairing highways—regardless of how it affects Dallas citizens. It’s time we took back our city and determined our own future.

**Highways are not the bad guys. Elevated interstate highways running through the middle of cities are.**

They reduce land values and discourage investment. The battle over I-345 presents an opportunity for Dallas to uncover and unleash the billions in value that lie underneath and around our aging elevated highways, to repopulate our southern sector, and to rebuild our tax base.

Interstates were originally meant to connect cities, not run through them; yet, we have three elevated interstates running through the heart of our city. Mayor Rawlings says that 55 percent of this traffic does not originate or stop in the City of Dallas. So why do we have them at all?

We have them because traffic engineers and highway builders in the 1960s and 1970s did not understand how cities work. Like the urban renewal projects of the time, which razed neighborhoods in order to save them, the elevated highways were considered progress. Their mission was to produce mobility and speed for city residents. Today, highway engineers seem honestly befuddled as to why their highways instead produce snarls and congestion.

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Here’s the thing about traffic. It’s a simple law of economics. If you make something easy and free, you will get more of it.

The elevated interstates that were rammed through downtown Dallas made trucking a long-haul load through the city easy and free. It made commuting from a job in one suburb to a home in another suburb easy and free. So the citizens of Dallas got more traffic, and they got nothing in return except for depressed land values and a reduced tax base in return.

It’s no surprise, then, that aside from the a few great civic projects and the development of Main Street, downtown Dallas seems to move in slow motion. The reason is that our city looks from the air as if it is hung on a concrete noose. In the meantime, Dallas County has lost 215,000 jobs in the last 11 years. Dallas is ranked 27th in growth last year among major American cities.