

# *The Dallas Morning News*

## **Tarrant toll road moving forward after payout concerns**

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AUSTIN – Texas transportation officials have received an all-clear signal from Attorney General Greg Abbott, whose concerns earlier this month about the constitutionality of a major toll road contract in Tarrant County had stalled the project.

**Northeast Loop 820** in Haltom City will be part of North Tarrant Express project involving a mix of free lanes and new tolled lanes. Texas will pay \$570 million to fund part of the \$2 billion road project.

Abbott had refused to attest to the "legal sufficiency" of the contract between Texas and the Spanish toll road company Cintra, as required by state law. Cintra has agreed to build the North Tarrant Express toll road with a mixture of state and private funds.

The North Texas Tollway Authority will operate the toll road, but the tolls will go to Cintra for 52 years.

But wording changes in the contract have resolved those concerns, and the Texas Department of Transportation said this week that the contract has been signed. A similar contract is set to be signed, also with Cintra, to rebuild LBJ Freeway in Dallas. Existing lanes will be rebuilt and remain free, but Cintra will add six tolled lanes.

On the contract signed this week, Texas will pay \$570 million to fund part of the \$2 billion project. Cintra and its partners will provide the rest through a mixture of equity and debt. In addition, TxDOT officials say the company's obligation to maintain the roads for 52 years will save Texas \$450 million.

The North Tarrant Express will run 13 miles along Northeast Loop 820 and State Highway 121, from Interstate 35W to the State Highway 121 split in Tarrant County. The project will be a mix of free lanes and new tolled lanes.