

I am here today to tell you about some very exciting creative thinking for Dallas that I have been a part of with a number of people over the last few months – what I have called in the title of my talk “another dream for Dallas”.

-We continue to be dreamers for Dallas – many of you will recall that last year I told you about some serious dreams to reconnect downtown Dallas to the corridor of the Trinity River – as a result of what was called the “Connected City Design Competition” undertaken by the CityDesign Studio at City Hall under the inspired leadership of Brent Brown. I am happy to report today that Brent has technical work now well underway to make big parts of that dream come true over the next few years. It is exciting to see that moving forward.

-This year I want to tell you about a different dream – a particular dream for greatly enhanced access to the Trinity River corridor that has come from a group of interesting and smart urban designers that I had the honor to lead and facilitate since last December.

-I want to tell you about our idea for a gracious and harmonious parkway for part of the Trinity River corridor area in central Dallas.

Now, wait a minute, you are probably saying, isn't there already a highway proposal for this area and isn't there a big debate going on about that right now and isn't this a big issue in the current civic election? Of course, the answers are yes and yes and yes – but what our little group came together to talk about is quite different from the highway that has been proposed and totally separate from the current political debate and the governments and groups that are involved in that debate.

-In fact, as I present this to you today, I want you to put that highway and that debate aside for just a moment so you can hear what we came up with. I think you might be pleasantly surprised.

-I want you to know that the group I was working with does not see itself as contributing to the current “yes or no” battle regarding the highway – we are sure you have all the insights

you need here in Dallas to fully play out that drama and to make your political decision about that. It is a healthy debate.

-I also want you to know that the group I was working with does not see itself as affiliated with any government or agency and really has nothing to do with the specific highway proposal that is currently before the Federal environmental authorities for approval – although we have been quite excited to see some very influential people take up some of our ideas in recent weeks – including His Worship, Mayor Rawlings.

-We were simply asked by a group of well-meaning Dallas citizens to take a fresh look at a situation that has dogged this town for a very long time. I think the people who sponsored our dreaming session felt that there might be another vision out there that would better meet the needs of this great new Trinity Park that is under development in the heart of Dallas.

-They felt that maybe the park needed a little special care and attention as this big debate about a highway takes its natural political course. They asked us to look at the whole question of

access and circulation from the perspective of the park – so that is what we did.

You may still be skeptical out there – you may be saying, well haven't a lot of technical people already dealt with these issues and hasn't a lot of money already been spent on a highway design? Again, the answer is yes – but that has been for what you might call the “big boom solution” – for a scheme that was conceived to fully serve the maximum transportation needs in this area of Dallas for a hundred years or more, a scheme that may not need to be fully built out for the foreseeable future, a scheme that may not have considered the needs of this magnificent new park as the top priority that we think it should be.

-We asked ourselves a different question: what does the park need, what will be good for park access and visibility and what would have the least impacts on the park?

-We also asked a parallel question: what would be the best for park access to set off a positive redevelopment of the very large

landholdings that are adjacent to the park? We could see that this economic development inquiry is very important to that larger question of connecting Dallas with the Trinity that we worked so hard on last year in the Connected City competition.

-Then we asked, with those considerations tied down, what kind of vehicular access way, if any, would be appropriate and was it possible to also meet the through-traffic aspirations for this district – so we felt it was smart to look again at the design of whatever street or way might be compatible for the area.

Having said all of this, there is no denying that our work was only a free-flow inquiry, not a detailed design process. What more can it be with just a few days' work, even if it was intensive, studio work. But in the world of city-design, it is often necessary to get disconnected from the web of details and all the noisy debate in order to see clearly the whole picture – to be able to see the forest instead of all the trees.

-We did not collect new data. We did not discuss funding. We did not try to work out every detail. We worked primarily from

our own knowledge and experience, augmented with information that is already readily available on the table.

-Initially we heard from some of the local experts that have been working on this but after that we worked alone, with several representatives of our sponsors coming along for the ride – we did not see ourselves as having to sort out all the rules and regulations for this kind of thing the way all the local experts have to do. But, as Jane Jacobs used to say, sometimes the rules rule out the right things.

-What we conceived is only a dream – a vision for a different way to look at the questions that you have not been able to put to rest here in Dallas for this roadway.

-There are a lot of people that have started to think that maybe there is a new idea – a better idea – that would take a different trajectory from the “yes or no” scenarios – the massive freeway or the do-nothing options that are the hot topics and the only choices at the moment here in Dallas.

So, we got together back in February and had a creative jam session over 4 days with some very distinguished visiting urbanists and we came up with a proposition that surprised even us.

-We had some of the smartest people in the country here for our session – the likes of Alex Kreiger from Harvard and Allen Jacobs from UC Berkeley and Jeff Tumlin from San Francisco and John Alshuler from New York – in fact, a group of some 12 very with-it professionals with no axe to grind here in Dallas but big reputations under their belts – here are the names; I’m sure you will know some of them from their profile here in Texas: people like Ignacio Bunster-Ossa, Alan Mountjoy, Tim Dekker, and Mark Simmons.

-We didn’t make it a big public event for three reasons – first, we were not sure we would come up with anything interesting or helpful so we did not want to get any hopes up – second, we did not want the whole thing to be taken over by the “yes or no” debate that is raging here right now (not much air time would be

left for the kind of fresh inquiry we felt we might be able to do) – and, third, for creative things to spark in our field, you have to have a studio atmosphere of design and exploration not an argumentative debating platform. In any event, we felt that anything we came up with would need full community review and discussion before it could be taken too seriously by anyone. Of course, it would also need a lot of technical testing.

In a preamble meeting back in December, we came to a few basic conclusions and set a simple set of objectives for our big creative jam session. Then when we actually all got here, again in February, those conclusions were strongly confirmed.

-First, we reviewed carefully the original Balanced Vision Plan completed back in 2003 and we all strongly agreed that it was a very solid plan and should be the philosophical basis for all of our work. It is the foundation – and it is very good.

-Second (and this will surprise some people in this room), we concluded unanimously that there needs to be some sort of auto access route into the Trinity Park corridor because the park lands



are just too cut off from the city by that unrelenting tall wall of levees. The park is so close but also so profoundly isolated. If all the park can be for most Dallas people is a distant view from atop a bridge as you speed by and if there is a struggle otherwise to get into the park, then it will always stay peripheral to the day-to-day experience of Dallas residents and visitors – and peripheral to the image and life of this city. There really does need to be a road of some kind into and through the place over those levees.

-Third, we decided to work toward three basic objectives that would put the needs of the park and park users first. We decided: (1) we would maximize visual and physical access to the Trinity Park corridor; (2) we would try to bring the park and development sites close together at the key points so the park can really become a genuine catalyst for development of the adjacent urban district; and, (3) yes, if possible, we would try to facilitate the auto bypass of the downtown that represents 80% of the demand for vehicles coming through the area, that is, if

we put aside the un-estimated number of cars that might actually want to stop to visit the park – it fascinated us that that particular figure, the auto demand for direct park access, has never actually been projected. We agreed we would pursue these objectives if it did not diminish the park design and experience – in fact, we felt we needed to expand and enhance that experience. We felt this was a reasonable and responsible agenda for a project of this kind.

-Fourth, at a highly conceptual level, we hypothesized what kind of auto access route might be suitable. We concluded that a limited-access highway and access ramp pattern, much like the size and capacity of the current maximum build-out design, is simply not needed – the traffic projections to 2030 confirm that point in no uncertain terms – and that kind of scheme does not offer much for the park or adjacent development. On the other hand, we found that a typical city street with lots of intersections and lights is not very realistic because it can never connect with the city street system on the other side of that wall of dikes. We

found that no street at all, well maybe just a pattern of access lanes and loops where convenient over the levees, is also not very helpful because it would offer no real expansion of the experience of the park for passers-by. This would miss a fundamental opportunity to open up the park in a big way to the people of Dallas. But we did conclude that a meandering parkway of a calibrated humane scale and slim, low-impact design might do the trick. We concluded that our design time in the charrette would be spent on that kind of scheme, in the great tradition of North American parkways – and I will come back to what that really means and to the design of that in a minute.

So what we designed in February is a “gracious and harmonious all-American parkway”. That’s what we think Dallas needs for the next generation or maybe even longer and that’s what we felt could fit comfortably within the beautiful park that is coming together on both sides of the Trinity River. The report of our work is available as of today.

And here's what it might look like. It is a complete, integrated concept but we highlighted 20 specific features that we think would make this place sing and I want to quickly take you through our ideas. There are 10 big moves and 10 supporting ideas.

First and foremost, this parkway only needs to be 4 lanes wide to comfortably carry all the traffic that is projected for the foreseeable future. That means building only one-half of the big freeway for the next generation. Those lanes can be narrower than is currently designed, they can include grass shoulders, and they can meander back and forth along the road corridor that is currently plotted.

I found a perfect inspiration for what is needed in a nice little parkway I came across in Perth, in Australia, and here is something like what might be the Dallas parkway cross-section.

There are similar examples in San Diego, Boston and along the Hudson River in New York, just to name a few other references. There's quite a tradition of integrated parkways in North

America.

Second, all those ramps that have been projected are just not needed – and it is the huge ramp systems that will really impact everything around them in a negative way. All you need is one set of ramps in and out on the north and another set on the south – remember only about 20% of drivers want to get off in the downtown; most will be passing right through – and there are perfectly good access streets downtown to channel the traffic once it is off the parkway. You can put the other many unnecessary groups of ramps on hold for a very long time and no one will even notice – maybe you will never even need them. And with this change, the whole arch design standard can be brought down to a more relaxed approach which you see in that Australian example I showed you a moment ago.

Third, if you carefully align the gentle meander of the parkway, not only do you open up more interesting views of the park, lakes and river, all along the route, but you can now slip in a batch of places to pull off and park on spots that might become

paved roadway in the far future. You can have them on both sides of the parkway which opens up the park to users like you have never dreamed of before. That means people will not only be able to see and feel the park up close and personal as they drive along but, if they want, they can stop and dive into the pleasures and recreation of this amazing space or relax and embrace a fine scenic overlook. This is the single most important idea to come out of our work – direct park access as a top priority, not just park views. It really needs to happen with this parkway.

Fourth, we think the treescape can be refined and enhanced in a dramatic way. Remember that lovely Australian example. We envisioned a consistent linear planting of large trees, closely spaced, all along the parkway giving it an elegant “tree-lined” character and beauty – and changing the highway image dramatically.

Fifth, we really loved the aspect of the current concept of creating a higher bench or elevation of land for the parkway

above the low valley of the river by using the excavation when digging out the new lakes. Along this bench, the general corridor and end connections that are shown in the current scheme work just fine, as the boundaries for swinging the meanders in the parkway gently back and forth; and also for getting the parkway over the levies north and south of downtown. This system will fit together really well. But, the bench is the best part because it offers more interesting contours for the parkway drive, good flood control, more opportunities for viewpoints in the pull-overs and a greater potential for ecologically generating landscaping all along the route. The bench will be the foundation for a really smart scheme that adds lakes and raises the parkway above the natural floor of the river corridor – so we like the bench of land a lot.

Sixth, we also loved the many pedestrian crossings that are included in the current proposal, so we included in our design all 15 and added a few more of the under and over pedestrian links from the city to the park that will give generous access for

people on foot and bikes at least every quarter mile or less. But we are suggesting that they become things of real beauty and real amenity as they are designed in detail.

Seventh, we felt that a lot more elegant design improvements can be completed on the flood protection barriers that are a necessity of any parkway scheme within the levees. They do not need to be ugly blank walls. They can be completed as hillocks and berms with landscaping and public art and the few actual walls that might still be needed can be finished as green features or with artistic treatments that tell some of the story and history of the river and the park. We actually think you could refine the design to a 10-year flood standard rather than a 100-year flood standard, which would dramatically open up new views and interest and character all along the parkway with very little risk. This might mean once a decade or so the occasional flood and momentary closure of the parkway but the beauty and character that would be achieved, we think, would be more than worth this tiny inconvenience. However, if the people of Dallas really



want that 100-year flood security, then so be it – but it can still be much more sensitively designed as an enhancement of the park experience.

Eighth, we think it is absolutely essential that you really go to town on a top notch landscape plan for the entire bench and bench edges down to the lower park – and especially at the stream outfalls all along the route. We think this is the place to instill a strong ecological strategy to regenerate habitat and enhance the natural landscape seasons and diversity of the park. For example, we could easily see this as a key stopping-off point for monarch butterflies on their annual migrations. The edges and stream outfalls could be places of remarkable beauty for the park that would entice people out of the city and into the park.

Ninth, we absolutely embraced the provision of the top-of-levee continuous bikeway and pedestrian pathway that is included in the current proposal. There had once been the hope for a full street at the top of the levee that could be a frontage street for the front doors of the new development. But now we see that is

not possible while protecting the integrity of the levee structures – but the bikeway/walkway is the next best thing and we think it is absolutely essential to make it easy to enjoy the park from hundreds of levee-top locations.

And then, tenth, all of this careful work to insinuate a delicate parkway and build up the park landscape and character and cut the impact of excessive ramps – all of this can become a powerful catalyst for private development outside the levees at the center of the alignment as an extension of downtown if every effort is taken to associate that development as close to the park as possible. This will take an extensive cluster of decking structures over the parkway with links directly down to the park. I'm talking about the vicinity of Reunion, where the jails are currently located – as I said last year, those penal institutions need to leave the edge of the river and find another location so that these prime sites can become the home of thousands of new Dallas downtown residents and offices. I'm also talking about the “mix-master district”. These pivotal private development

parcels can be brought on years earlier than would otherwise be expected if the links to the park and spacious boardwalks for the park can be built right up front. But, of course, none of this will happen if the highway and all the ramps create a harsh barrier between the development sites and the green corridor.

Those are the ten big moves and they will create a wonderful parkway framework that opens up and plays up the park to the highest possible degree. But even this can be enhanced with a few more very special features – here is a list of the reinforcing secondary moves that would really make the whole design sing.

- As you see, this includes banning trucks from this alignment – the trucks do not need the route and the park does not need the truck impacts.

- This includes allowing on-street parking along the parkway during the weekends when through traffic has no need for the route but park users would surely enjoy the convenient parking.

- This includes implementing a variation in the tolling procedure to facilitate equitable park use – actually forgiving the toll if a

car stops for two hours or longer in one of the pull-offs along the route. This would really incentivize park use without sacrificing very much tolls revenue.

- This includes adding a simple u-turn opportunity somewhere mid-point along the parkway so park users can move around more freely to access the key park attractions.

- This includes implementing every one of the network of service roads and bikeways and pedestrian paths along and around the parkway that are already included in the current plan. These all open up the park dramatically for people once you add the pull-off points that we are suggesting. It is like an enticing web of access and it will be a magnet for people.

- This includes locating new transit stops to enhance transit-user access to the park over the parkway – for example at Houston Bridge and Riverfront Boulevard.

- And this includes some clever design refinement for pullovers at the location of five major “wow” views that we discovered

that give astounding perspectives over the park and parkway to the city skyline.

And then the whole ensemble can be used to spread the economic development pattern all along the route.

-For the “design district” adding a regular and attractive pattern of pedestrian connections across the parkway to the park will speed up the incremental development trend that is already evident.

-For the “southside district”, doing a major overhaul of the existing water bodies, now called the “sumps”, will rev up the current development inclination, because these “sumps” have the potential to be the knockout amenities that are more important than even the park and parkway in this area.

-For the districts at the far north and south ends of the parkway, just before it would join the existing highways, a strategy to build public and private facilities under or over the parkway will spur private investment that can augment the existing neighborhoods – developments like these.

So there it is – twenty ideas that make a dramatically different vision for what a street and a park and economic development can do for one another and for the city of Dallas – if all the thinking is driven by the vision for the park; if it is all carefully designed and managed in the interests of that most magnificent transformations of all – the vast park, river and nature corridor. Yes, this vision has a road in the corridor but, you can see, this road is nothing like the limited-access highway that has been talked about for this area for the last few years.

And the amazing thing about this vision is that it fits nicely within the framework of the design that is already under scrutiny for federal environmental approval. We did not really plan it that way. We just said that we should design what we felt Dallas needs for the foreseeable future. But when we completed our sketches we realized that it would actually fit as a compatible “first phase” of the proposal that is currently on the books – either it was a confirmation of components of the current proposal or it reflects compatible variations for immediate

construction or it predicted the kind of design refinements that have to yet be undertaken anyway or it reflected economic development ideas that had not been addressed before. So anyone who wants to can see it as a practical, comfortable first phase. But to be frank, it is a first phase that might never need a second phase – or that might become so beloved by the people that a second phase would simply no longer be appealing if it swept away the benefits that people will have come to enjoy and treasure. The point is, your children's children can decide what they want when the time finally comes to think about further phases and further construction.

We think our 20-point concept represents a powerful and compelling dream for Dallas.

-Of course, it needs full review with the public in a wide public process. Yes, it will also need detailed multi-disciplinary design refinement and careful testing.

-But not another pencil should ever be put to paper on this project without a strong urban design hand – this parkway

cannot just reflect engineering standards. It needs the engineers working hand-in-hand with architects and landscape architects and ecological scientists and water artists and all the rest.

-But also, it will need a conscience that is “of the people” if this moves forward. Our suggestion is a carefully arranged monitoring of implementation, now and on an ongoing basis into the distant future, by a panel of both professional and citizen monitors who can make sure the good design does not again get distorted.

The participants in this review had to walk a very fine line between their general philosophical views of what they consider best world practice, the particular circumstances and needs here in Dallas, the official status of the process for this particular project, and their judgment about the expectations of future Dallas residents. Having said this, throughout the review we have tried to err on the side of what will be best for Dallas now and into the future, not what have been the conclusions of the past. We were also trying to discover how to move a compatible



project forward so that the needs of many interests can be satisfied but also balanced. In our preferred scheme, no one interest prevails over another and all interests have been subject to some concessions and compromises. At the same time, we firmly believe the proposed pattern works well as a whole and favors the park every step along the way.

You don't need that big aggressive new highway in your wonderful park – so don't let it happen. Go for something a lot better. We think a gracious and harmonious parkway, done in a gentle and humane way with nature as its inspiration and the park as its client, is a very practical thing. We think it is a necessary thing. We think it can be a thing of utility and of beauty. And it can be brought within reach if you, the people of Dallas, have the courage to insist that it happen.

Thank you.