



Ashley Landis/Staff Photographer

The section of Interstate 30 known as the Canyon divides downtown Dallas from the Cedars neighborhood to the south. Bridges such as South Harwood Street carry pedestrians and cyclists over zooming traffic below.

## DOWNTOWN/THE CEDARS

# A not-so-grand canyon

By CHRISTINE SCHMIDT  
Staff Writer  
cschmidt@dallasnews.com

The Canyon in downtown Dallas is a different kind of grand.

Spanning at least eight lanes and bordering both the southern end of downtown Dallas and the rising artist and tech enclaves of the Cedars, the Canyon is the below-grade Interstate 30 highway. Pedestrians and cyclists pass over the Canyon on sidewalks without shade — or protection from the cars zooming alongside them.

Concerned about gentrification and increased traffic amid less space, some small business owners are hesitant to embrace potential changes proposed by the Texas Department of Transportation. Others — including younger, newer residents excited by the area's vibe — want to see downtown Dallas become more pedestrian friendly and community oriented.

"People are craving [a] move to an urban environment so they can explore ... without having to commute long distances or having to use their cars," said Kourtney Garrett, president of economic development group Downtown Dallas Inc.

TxDOT's landmark study called CityMAP, which contemplates the future of downtown highways, went further than looking at traffic patterns. It shed light on the impact different construction scenarios could have on neighborhood connectivity and economic development.

For downtown and the Cedars, that could mean turning I-30's auxiliary lanes into frontage roads, increasing the number of main lanes or relocating the highway south of Fair Park.

These changes, TxDOT says, could increase the development value of the area by \$500 million to \$970 million, attract thousands of people to downtown homes, and add over 200 feet of sidewalks. The cost could top \$2 billion.

Earparimal "Pari" Pandya thinks making the area more accessible to walkers and bicyclists is worth it. A recent Dallas transplant from New York City, Pandya lives in a condominium in the Cedars.

"If you want to start putting Dallas really on the map, we [should] create a pedestrian-friendly environment," he said. "I'm a mile from work but I can't walk. ... We [shouldn't have] a superhighway here so people can zoom from suburbs to downtown offices."



JIM  
BOWMAN

Pandya was visiting the Farmers Market, which recently was rebranded into a food hall of small business owners. Yolande Plaza, who owns the market's Caribbean Cabana booth with her husband, Robert, isn't sold on relocating I-30.

"The population around this area — it will have so much traffic," she said. "Leave it as it is, as crazy as it is. If they make it a local street ... oof."

On the other side of I-30, away from the bustling Farmers Market, sits the home and studio of Jim Bowman. He and his wife are glasswork artists who have lived in the Cedars for 15 years.

Bowman said he used to watch people sell drugs and hire prostitutes

from his porch. But when the Dallas Police Association moved into a building across the street, "the neighborhood got cleaned up real fast," he said.

Since then, the Cedars has continued to grow, with major developers and foundations backing plans to transform former manufacturing plants into arts centers, startup hubs and upscale apartments.

Bowman can't fathom TxDOT changing the Canyon.

"Not in my lifetime," he said. "It's too bad. But people have to have their cars. You gotta get around."

Yet it's not only motorists who rely on highways. The underpasses are attractive places for homeless people to live. The structures provide protection from inclement weather, are near panhandling opportunities and have trespassing restrictions that are traditionally unenforced by TxDOT, said Sam Merten, chief operating officer of the Bridge Homeless Recovery Center.

The Bridge provides daytime services for about 1,000 homeless people every day. But Merten knows change is already on the horizon for the homeless population.

"We have half a million dollar condos sitting literally where there used to be homeless encampments. ... Now you've got people who are just moving in and saying, 'Hey, what's up with all these homeless people? It would be an even better neighborhood if we didn't have them around,'" he said. "As that growth continues, what do you do?"