

# High Five down below

Too slow for the roads above? Project will link hike-and-bike paths, blazing trail from Plano to downtown Dallas

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By **WENDY HUNDLEY / The Dallas Morning News**

Far below the concrete mountain of the High Five interchange, four snowy egrets wade in the shallow waters of Cottonwood Creek.



NATALIE CAUDILL/DMN

**The 2,320-foot portion of the Cottonwood Trail running beneath the High Five was recently completed but isn't open to the public yet.**

The long-legged, white birds seem oblivious to the ceaseless din of traffic as they search for food in the slow-moving water that snakes its way through massive columns supporting the five levels of roadway. Despite the cars and clatter, nature continues its unhurried pace 120 feet below the busy lanes of traffic.

"It's beautiful under there," said Antoinette Bacchus, project manager for the Cottonwood Trail. When complete, the hike-and-bike path will provide a close-up view of the underbelly of the High Five along part of its route.

While only four miles long, the Cottonwood Trail will form a key link connecting the existing Preston Ridge Trail in Plano to the White Rock Creek Trail. A preliminary conceptual design of the trail was unveiled Thursday in Dallas.

Officials said they planned to start construction on the 1.5 miles of missing links in the trail by late 2007. The project will take about a year to complete. A 3,500-foot section along Coit and Spring Valley roads in Richardson probably won't be completed until 2009.

"There will be 35 contiguous miles of trail from Plano all the way through to downtown Dallas," said former Dallas City Council member Mary Poss, who has been

active in raising \$1.2 million in private funds to beautify the trail with landscaping, drinking fountains and benches.

Most of the private funds will be used to create a landscaped green space near Hamilton Park. The wireless Internet hotspot will feature two plazas, stone columns, benches and a pedestrian bridge over the Cottonwood Creek, said Randal Phillips, a landscape architect for Huitt-Zollars Inc.

Ms. Bacchus, the project manager, said officials have secured \$1.8 million in federal funds to start the \$6.5 million project. On May 26, the North Central Texas Council of Governments placed the Cottonwood Trail at the top of the list to receive \$3.4 million. If the Regional Transportation Council approves the recommendation next month, the funding will require a local match of \$843,808.

The Texas Department of Transportation recently completed the 2,320-foot segment of the Cottonwood Trail running beneath the High Five. This part of the trail, which is not yet open to the public, was built when the interchange was under construction.

"The trail currently comes from nowhere and goes nowhere," said Dan Peden, project manager of the High Five.

The north end of the Cottonwood Trail starts on the west side of Central Expressway and follows the Cottonwood Creek as it runs under the interchange, ending on the east side of the expressway.

When the concrete trail is complete, pedestrians and bikers can get a close-up view of some of the High Five's colorful murals that are hard to appreciate when tooling along at 60 mph. Lights have been installed under the bridges to brighten the pathway. The rest of the trail enhancements will be provided by nature.

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