



Future 281 Toll Road, & Economic Effects

Throughout our day to day activities in San Antonio, you can drive along any major highway during morning or afternoon rush hour and find that our highways look like parking lots. Reducing these traffic jams and congestion is the goal for Alamo RMA, an independent agency created to provide these needed transportation projects. As many already know, their first step is to concentrate on the far North Central submarket by developing a Hwy 281 toll road from Loop 1604 to the Bexar/Comal county line.

With population growth, new businesses, and increased development along this 281 project area, traffic volumes have increased dramatically and the Texas highway system has not kept pace with our needs. Between 1989 and now, traffic volumes have increased 400% along this corridor. Average delays per traveler in San Antonio last year was 43 hours. The average time it takes to get from 1604 to Marshall Road alone is 24 minutes during rush hour. To say something needs to be done is an understatement.

In the last five to ten years, the ever popular 281 north corridor has seen numerous SF residential developments along Hwy 281 that have had huge success and led to this submarket having one of the highest demographics in the city. The “mega-community” that is Stone Oak has provided a run off of more businesses to the area and retail developments than we could have ever imagined. Corporations such as Clear Channel, Washington Mutual, and the future Tesoro Energy campus at Redland and 1604 have all found a home along 281. It’s allowed for a new medical/hospitality area in the city, along with entertainment venues such as the future TPC Golf Course & JW Marriott. The following are some notable retail developments along Hwy 281 between Loop 1604 and Bulverde Road that have helped change the landscape of this corridor:

- The Legacy (Best Buy, Lifetime Fitness)
- North Point
- Encino Park Center (HEB, Home Depot)
- Encino Crossing
- Villages at Stone Oak (Super Target)
- Future 20 acre retail development at Marshall Rd. by Dominion Advisory Group, & 27 acre mixed use development at Stone Oak Pkwy

We have always known the potential for 281 north is great, however we are also starting to see possible hindrances for future development, mainly: (1) 281 north has a limitation of sewer availability due to the recharge restrictions (Bulverde/Bogfield & 281 area is outer limits of sewer). (2) Hwy 281 north does

not have the capacity like that of IH-10 or I-35. The population has far over-exceeded the capable use, causing congestion and thus the reason for the 281 toll road project.

The project plan is to have two-lane toll roads going down the middle in both directions with three-lane access roads along the outsides. Crossover interchanges will be set up at Evans Rd, Stone Oak Pkwy, Marshall Rd, Wilderness Oaks, and Bulverde Rd. Committee meetings in the next few weeks will decide how much money they have and if they can extend the toll road farther north. Plans are set to start construction at the beginning of next summer. Residents have had mixed emotions when it comes to toll roads because of the high costs, which consequently will be 17 cents per mile and increase 2.75% annually. On the plus side, this money will only be used for future road projects in our city. For the most part, there are far more benefits that we will receive by having this Hwy 281 toll road.

Enhancing infrastructure brings many economic benefits along with quality of life effects. Traffic congestion is an important factor in the perceived desirability of living in various areas. Less congestion also means greater public safety, reduced travel time, and improved environmental conditions. This mainly affects local residents along with single family development. The 281 north area is in very high demand; however, the amount of traffic you'd have to put up with by living out there is not. Now imagine if there was no congestion, the demand and value would skyrocket.

Reduced travel time and costs within the toll corridor allow for more resources available for consumers and local purchases. All of which are pumped back into our economy. The same holds true for businesses - reducing costs and drive time provide expanded opportunities for future developments and land purchases within the corridor. Also, by increasing accessibility, and improving linkages throughout the city, builders, developers, corporations and other business entities will be more willing to locate here. The enhanced activity generated by the toll road provides more investment and job opportunities along with increased tax revenues.

Land prices on or proximate to the toll road area will most certainly rise with the improved infrastructure. We will see a greater competitiveness among these businesses, builders, and developers to locate to the area to find a higher capture value.

In conclusion, the greater proportion of inter-corridor activity only helps stimulate all aspects of economic activity across a broad spectrum of industries, further allowing the growth of this far north central sector and promoting more overall development. We should see a direct effect all the way out to Hwy 46 and Bulverde in the coming future.

- Mike Fanuzzi