



Blanco Road project opens former bottleneck

Maria Anglin - Express-News

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A Hill Country view on a brisk and sunny November morning can be inspiring and energizing, especially now that the Blanco Road expansion project is complete.

Thursday morning hit that nail on the head. Around 10 a.m., community leaders and neighborhood organizers turned out for a ribbon-cutting marking the end of construction. They weren't the only ones.

While the group gathered for coffee and doughnuts under a big Bexar County tent in the Double Dave's parking lot at the corner of Blanco and Huebner roads, a diminutive and unassuming character leaned against the curb and watched the celebration.

Reluctantly, he identified himself as a karst invertebrate, adding that anybody who's anybody just calls him Karst.

"Yeah, I know. I live in karst," he clarified with a hint of defensiveness, "but, as you should know, not the cave that could have stopped this project."

I told him I'd heard that space was sealed because nothing endangered was found; he nodded while munching on a piece of doughnut.

"It was all very professional; they checked it out, did everything they were supposed to — which is emblematic of this project. They really cared about the details. I've got to hand it to 'em," he said, shielding his eyes from the sunlight.

"The county did this right. Blanco sparkles. There are bike lanes, sidewalks, even a spot called a jug handle for drivers to pull into in case oncoming traffic is off-the-chain fast and U-turning into traffic might be iffy. I've never seen one before, but it sounds like a stellar idea."

State Rep.-elect Lyle Larson, a driving force when this project first began in the spring of 2008, pointed out to the group how this project — the largest single-road construction project in the history of Bexar County — opened up a bottleneck that frustrated commuters who sat in the same traffic snarl every day.

Karst nodded emphatically.

"You wouldn't believe — *you wouldn't believe* — how bad it could get when someone would drive up one of

the turn lanes in front of the Target to try to scoot in front of drivers who had been waiting in line. Then again," said the invertebrate, "I'm nonconfrontational."

Karst especially applauded the pass-through finance angle, which means the county fronted the money for the \$30 million project.

Bexar County Engineer Renee Green explained that the county used its borrowing capacity to finance the plan. Then, the state reimbursed \$20 million, and the remainder of the tab was filled by Advance Transportation District funds that voters approved. The Texas Department of Transportation, Green said, will take over the road in a few months.

"This is brand new," Green told the group. "This is the beginning of what we hope will be a long partnership with TxDOT."

Green cited four such projects currently in the works — among them the widening of Potranco Road and work along Loop 1604 from Randolph AFB to Interstate 10 East.

"Teamwork!" Karst exclaimed as Larson and County Judge Nelson Wolff wrapped it up by snipping the big red ribbon facing Kennedy's Pub. "It's all good ... good planning."

As he sauntered off, I asked him if he'd checked out the superstreet changes on U.S. 281, which seem to have traffic moving along.

"Yeah, but today I'm headed up I-35," he said. "I've got to go brag to a salamander in San Marcos."

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