

Residents protest proposed bridge over Lavon Lake

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Joe Simmons traded the congestion of Plano for the tranquillity of Lavon Lake a year ago.

He moved his family to a home on 3 acres with a lake view. He drives down a secluded road to reach his hilltop property in eastern Collin County.

"I love it," Simmons said. "It's nice and quiet. The air is fresh, and there's lots of wildlife."

He fears that a proposed six-lane bridge across the southern end of Lavon Lake would destroy his serenity.

Simmons and many other lake residents plan to attend a public hearing Wednesday night in Wylie to protest the project. They say it's too expensive, isn't necessary to relieve congestion and would bring unwanted development to the lake.

"One of the plans comes right through my front yard," said [Jerry Jones](#), who has lived on the lake for 21 years. "I'm going to fight it tooth and nail as long as I can."

County officials stress that the bridge isn't warranted now and may never be built. If it is, construction might not begin for 20 years or more, they say.

For now, officials want to select an alignment in case the county's growth necessitates a bridge. Several proposed routes will be presented at the hearing at 7 p.m. Wednesday at the Wylie Municipal Complex.

"I think everybody thinks we're going to come out next week and start construction," said County Commissioner Joe Jaynes, whose district includes the lake. "That's just not the case."

Not enough people

The portion of Collin County east of Lavon Lake is largely unincorporated. It doesn't have enough people to justify a major connector across the lake, said Commissioner Jerry Hoagland, who also represents part of the lake area.



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HOUSE/Special Contributor

Joe Simmons worries that a proposed six-lane bridge across the southern end of Lavon Lake would destroy his serene lifestyle.

Eventually, however, the county's population is expected to more than double to about 2 million people.

"Then it would likely be a viable project," Hoagland said.

The project would actually consist of two bridges. One would start on the lake's west side in Lucas and connect to the peninsula in the center. A second bridge would extend to the eastern shore near the town of Lavon.

Irma Batres has lived on the lake's east side for 12 years. She calls her modest home a "handyman's special," but she doesn't want to lose it to make room for the bridge.

"It's beautiful out here," Batres said. "It's a little piece of heaven. You can see hawks and cranes."

The homes around the lake vary greatly. A new brick house may sit next to a dilapidated frame one.

County Engineer Ruben Delgado said officials have no timetable to acquire right of way for the bridges and thoroughfare. Even if commissioners choose a preferred route after this week's hearing, no design work is planned in the foreseeable future, Delgado said.

"It could stay a line on the map forever," he said.

Cost considerations

Cost is a major obstacle in constructing the bridges. The Lewisville Lake Toll Bridge, which opened Aug. 1, cost \$118 million. It's 1.7 miles long. The entire length of the two Lavon Lake bridges and roadway would be about 8 miles.

County Judge Keith Self, who heads commissioners court, said he thinks the proposed bridge routes are too far south. For instance, they are only about 2 miles north of State Highway 78, which travels east and west, south of the lake.

"At that point, is it worth the cost?" Self said. "I was figuring on splitting the lake as a general order of magnitude."

Many bridge opponents say they don't have a preference among the proposed alignments. They dislike them all.

"Asking the folks around Lake Lavon to pick a path is like asking, 'OK, where would you like to be shot?'" said Kay Nordby.

She and her husband, Todd, began an opposition Web site, savelakelavon.com. It encourages people to attend the hearing Wednesday, and it offers signs opposing the project.

Kay Nordby thinks citizen outcry can defeat the bridge.

"This plan will be stopped," she said. "The question is, how much more money is the county willing to spend before they pull the plug?"