

San Antonio Express-News

Long awaited road project schedule takes a detour

Express-News Editorial Board

Updated 4:48 pm, Monday, May 14, 2018

This won't be the last fall semester that South Side Independent School District students in the Highland Oaks areas will have to hike treacherous roads to meet the school bus.

Long-awaited plans for the paving of streets in this low-income community — where the roads are so bad school buses can't navigate them — are being delayed.

“The timeline has been extended approximately 3 months to make sure drainage is properly addressed. To ensure this, Bexar County will need to acquire several additional easements,” Monica Ramos, the county's public information officer, said in an email.

This means a completion date by fall 2019 for this project in deep South Bexar County is no longer anticipated.

We urge Commissioners Court to move this project along as expeditiously as permissible and attempt to keep to the original schedule.

This is a matter of promises made and promises that need to be kept for a project that should have been undertaken years ago.



Photo: JERRY LARA /San Antonio Express-News

Four-year-old Makayla Navaeh Navarro, 4, plays as her grandfather, Cornelio Navarro Gonzalez, 59, work on the family house in the Highland Oaks neighborhood in South Bexar County in 2016. The subdivision is located in far south Bexar County and lacks paved roads, which means children have to trek to school bus stop in the mud. A road improvement project has been delayed.

At a meeting in November, Highland Oaks residents were told that bids for construction of the roads would be awarded in the spring and roadwork would begin this summer. County officials said they expect to meet with Highland Oaks residents in the fall to give them an update on the project once the construction contract is awarded.

It is concerning that the need for the additional easements was not determined earlier and is having an adverse effect on the project's completion date.

Each month of delay is another month that children meeting the bus in this impoverished community have to deal with ankle-deep mud when it rains.

For decades, residents of this community sought county assistance for their roads only to have their pleas rebuffed by county officials who claimed it was not their problem to fix.

It was only after intervention by **COPS/Metro Alliance** and the Southside Independent School District administration, and a slew of adverse media publicity about the hazards the road conditions presented that commissioners decided to fund the project.

In an unprecedented move, commissioners determined the roads in such terrible shape that they constituted a public safety hazard. That finding allowed them to allocate public funds to fix what they considered were private roads.

Highland Oaks roads were among 103 streets identified by the county's public works department as in dire need of repair.

They have become part of a 10-year plan with a projected price tag of \$28 million that the county has drafted to address road problems in unincorporated Bexar County.

The 2.38 miles of unpaved roads in Highland Oaks topped the priority list, and it was the only new capital improvement project commissioners funded in their 2017-18 budget. Bexar County commissioners need to keep the momentum going on these public safety projects by continuing to fund the projects they have on the list and ensuring there are no unnecessary project delays.

The children are depending on it.