

Tollway

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ages much of his father's business.

Perot Jr. in the past has pointed to the tollway as the sort of public transportation facility that he and his father would like to have under private control.

The prospect of Perot's move to acquire the tollway adds a new twist to a business deal that has been discussed for weeks as a transaction strictly between Dallas County and the Texas Turnpike Authority.

Luther Jones, chairman of the state turnpike authority, said he had assumed that the only other conceivable buyer was the City of Dallas.

Jones said he could not imagine a private business owner with enough financial clout to make a bid for the tollway.

Told of the interest expressed by Perot associates, Jones said such a deal would have to be "obviously, conclusively better" than transferring the tollway to Dallas County.

Dallas County commissioners voted this week to pursue the deal as a way of keeping tollway revenue in the county.

County Judge Lee Jackson told the *Business Journal* later that he sees no rationale for allowing Perot to get involved in the tollway operation.

"That's like saying, 'I might like to own all the McDonald's restaurants in America,'" Jackson said. "They're not for sale."

Perot adviser Wallace Hawkes, however, said that an opportunity for Perot to get involved in the tollway might develop.

Hawkes pointed out that Dallas County would have to incur about \$400 million in public debt to assume responsibility for the tollway.

The money would be needed to pay for completed construction work as well as a planned extension of the tollway into the northern suburbs.

"We hear that it might change hands, and obviously that gets our attention," Hawkes said. "The guy that loans you the money calls the shots."

Perot in March launched a tollway development venture with Greiner Engineering Inc. of Dallas.

Perot interests also have presented state officials with plans for four new tollways in the Dallas area, including one that Cain says was conceived as an extension of the Dallas North Tollway.

Cain said representatives have been meeting with the Texas Department of Transportation to help establish rules for the development of privately owned toll roads in the state.

"We continue to meet with, work with, and coordinate with the state," he said.

The rules that Perot representatives are seeking would restrict the amount of competition that could occur once the state has selected a developer for a tollway.

While it is not clear how those limits would affect the Dallas North Tollway, Perot officials said the future of that facility could affect their plans for building more tollways in the region.

David Newsom, a Perot attorney and lobbyist, said the tycoon and his business associates are examining a number of opportunities to "privatize" toll roads.

"I'm sure the Dallas North Tollway would be a candidate," Newsom said.

The tollway — which opened in 1968 — has become a major north-south corridor that carries nearly 200,000 motorists a day.

According to state officials, toll revenue in 1991 was \$30.6 million.

Dallas County officials say that if they took over the tollway, they would integrate the operation and its estimated 180 employees into county government.

Government agencies in other parts of the country have utilized tollway operations not only to pay for a road itself, but also to generate revenue for other public expenses.

David Griffin, executive director of the Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition, called the Dallas North Tollway "a real golden goose."

Griffin said he supports transferring the tollway to Dallas County, but he would oppose relinquishing control to Perot or any other private concern.

"It would be giving away a valuable asset," he said.

Those familiar with Perot's interest in private tollways, however, say they would not be surprised to see him make an overture for the tollway.

The partnership he forged last year has been active in California, Arizona, Florida and Georgia.

The four tollway proposals presented in Texas last year were filed just as an old state law on private tollways was about to expire. The proposals call for one tollway across Tarrant County, two across Collin County and another extending into Grayson County.

State officials say it remains to be seen whether those proposals will have any standing under the new rules being prepared by the Department of Transportation.

Cain said the state might determine that Perot's plans have exclusive rights in the Dallas area.

In testimony to state officials this summer, Perot aides urged state transportation officials to adopt rules ensuring that private tollway developers face no competition.

"A project should be protected from the development of a different project which would, by drawing away traffic, undermine the economics of the first project," the testimony read.

Ray Stoker, chairman of the state's transportation commission, said private tollways are "on the horizon."

But, he said, the Dallas North Tollway is a model for private developers to emulate — not for them to take over.

Michael Morris of the North Central Texas Council of Governments questioned whether government needs business to be involved in tollway developments at all.

Referring to Perot and his associates, he added: "They are ready, willing and able to step forward if asked. I'm just not sure we need to ask them yet."