

Highway increases land value Businesses take opportunities freeway offers

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Colby is not only an "Oasis on the Plains," but is also an oasis of opportunity. With the city developing south toward Interstate 70, Colby continues to benefit from its freeway access.

"All development has increased the valuation of our sales tax and sales revenue," said Carolyn Armstrong, city manager. "It encourages new development because people look at the community as a place to build. Activity generates more activity."

Before the city acknowledged its ideal location, the land near the Interstate was probably zoned as agriculture, said Marilyn Meyer, an agent at HomeLand Real Estate. "A lot of it was different then because it was used for farming."

Ms. Meyer said the valuation of developed and undeveloped land on either side of the freeway is anywhere between \$33,000 to \$39,000 per acre today. Most of the land is commercial sites in platted areas with four to five acres in each lot.

"Raw ground is less expensive, so that would play a part in pricing of the land out there," she added.

Land fronting Country Club Drive is selling for \$30,000 per acre, said Ron Evans of Farm and Ranch Realty.

The completion of Horton Avenue, a street which parallels the south side of I-70 connecting the two exits, has given additional access to and from the Oasis Travel Center, in addition to providing sites for commercial and development for the future. Willow Street, paralleling the



COLBY'S LOCATION ON I-70 has helped it retain and expand existing businesses and offer new services to motorists and residents.

— Photo by Michelle Myers/Colby Free Press

north side of the Interstate, also opens up some areas to development.

"The ability to have two frontage roads and having everything clean and sharp, it's not only good for us now, but really gives us a bright future," said Gerry Fulwider, executive director of the Thomas County Economic Development Alliance. "Several people come in wanting information on hotels, so we could see more hotels, industrial sales, more fast food restaurants and sit-down restaurants."

The alliance, on its website, says Thomas County hopes to expand from its traditional agricultural economic base to provide opportunities for manufacturing and retail growth.

"More businesses bring people to Colby," said Evans.

Truck Town was the first business to take advantage of Horton Avenue, and another truck stop, Bosselmans, is following with a center on the northeast corner of Country Club Drive and I-70.

"Bosselmans sat back and watched Mike Woofter build the Oasis Travel Center and saw how successful that was," Armstrong said.

"Bosselmans undoubtedly will develop. It's certainly a major deal for us," said Fulwider.

While the freeway continues to draw new businesses, the shift of the town's economic base to the south may be a concern for the downtown district.

"It's an age-old conflict," said Fulwider. "The more the retail community is drawn to the Interstate, (the more) it will hurt retail businesses downtown, but we have a wonderful business district."

"The downtown community kind of struggles. Hopefully our downtown will survive and thrive," said Armstrong. "Colby is very fortunate to have Interstate 70, and highways 24 and 25. It's always location, location, location."

Even though the Interstate has only been in existence for about half a century, Colby has always had a reputation as being in a good loca-

tion for settlement and business. It was developed around two railroad lines, which still serve grain elevators north and south of town.

Later, the Interstate highway system was built as a result of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who wanted to mirror the Autobahn in Germany. Eisenhower signed the Federal-Aid Highway Act creating the system on June 29, 1956.

Interstate 70 was one of the first interstate highways to be built, according to the Federal Highway Administration, with Pennsylvania, Missouri and Kansas each claiming to be the first state to have built the first section of the road. In Kansas, the first section was built west of Topeka on November 14, 1956, and the state currently has 874 miles of Interstate, including the Kansas Turnpike.

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