



## Gas prices fuel only temporary spike in Dallas transit ridership

By MICHAEL A. LINDENBERGER

Transportation Writer

[mlindenberg@dallasnews.com](mailto:mlindenberg@dallasnews.com)

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If gas prices are lower this summer, will that mean fewer riders on Dallas Area Rapid Transit trains and buses?

The question hovered in the background of a national teleconference last week in which leaders from transit agencies across the country, including DART, called for more federal funding.

Some in Congress, however, would like to divert a portion of transit funding to highways.

The transit leaders noted the connection between high gas prices and increased use of mass transportation.

"People are looking for choices, even in Dallas, Texas," said Gary Thomas, president of DART and the 2012 chairman of the American Public Transportation Association. Thomas was joined by the transit chiefs from San Diego and Columbus, Ohio, as well as longtime transportation advocate Ed Rendell, former governor of Pennsylvania.

When gas prices spiked in 2008, bringing \$4-per-gallon gas to many parts of the country for the first time, they triggered record ridership in agencies across the country. DART was no exception.

But that gas prices-transit use nexus hasn't been as clear in Dallas as in some other places. Unlike in Columbus and, to a lesser degree, San Diego, DART riders did not stay when gas prices dropped.

In August 2008, DART light-rail trains were setting records for weekday use. Bus ridership jumped at the same time.

But as gas prices fell that fall, commuters quickly returned to their cars. By August 2010, the average weekday ridership on DART rail was down to 56,608 — lower than it had been in 2005 despite the opening of four new Green Line stations the previous year.

Bus numbers also quickly fell to well below what they had been before the summer surge. DART rail numbers didn't return to 2008 levels until the Green Line was fully opened in December 2010.

Since then, with only a couple of exceptions, weekday ridership has remained essentially flat, at about 73,000 daily trips. And during that time, DART has added nearly 30 miles of light-rail network, driving up its costs.

One-third of the daily ridership on DART trains comes from the Green Line service, which didn't exist two years ago. Take those riders away, and it's clear that ridership on the Red and Blue Lines has never returned to the levels it reached in 2008.

Officials from across the country who spoke last week suggested that the recent higher gas prices — already starting to recede — again triggered gains in mass transit across the country.

But that doesn't appear to tell the whole story in Dallas.