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Uncle Sam to send \$1 million to Fort Worth to kick-start bike-share program

comments (3)



By Michael Lindenberg
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10:24 am on July 23, 2012 | Permalink



Bike-share programs, a fixture in some international cities like Paris, are gaining in popularity in America. San Antonio, Oklahoma City, and Denver -- shown here during the 2008 Democratic National Convention -- all have bike share programs. Soon, Fort Worth will too. (Bloomberg)

The Obama Administration has awarded The T in Fort Worth about \$1 million to build a bike-share program. I couldn't be more jealous.

Here's how the U.S. Department of Transportation described the grant, announced this morning by Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood on [his blog](#): "To further improve mobility and connectivity between popular destinations, the Fort Worth Transportation Authority will implement the Fort Worth Livability Bike Sharing Program. Bike stations will be placed in areas that have dense neighborhoods with high activity and access to a variety of transit connections. Bike stations will also be placed at the intermodal hub in Ft. Worth."

Joan Hunter, spokeswoman for The T, said she learned of the grant through a call from the city this morning and was still tracking down details. But she said the transit agency has been working on a plan to run a pilot program for the bike-share in hopes of "being a catalyst for the city of Fort Worth."

She said if the program works, officials are hoping the city will expand it and set up the Fort Worth bike share effort as a standalone entity. She said the agency was hoping to have the bike-share pilot project underway by the end of this year, but was still looking for the necessary funding. The federal grant will help a lot, she said.

The plan will be modeled in many ways on the San Antonio bike share program, which puts computerized bike racks at key places throughout downtown. Users can check out the bike with a credit card, or swipe a membership card if they are on a monthly or year plan. A user buys a specified period of time to use the bike, say an hour or three, and when time is up the bike must be parked back in one of the racks — either the one it was checked out from or any of the others.

The transit grants showed nearly \$800 million on agencies throughout the U.S. and Fort Worth's pile of dough was considerably smaller than many of the other grants, including several that topped \$10 million in Texas. But in terms of putting something new on the ground, the money may have most noticeable impact.

In Dallas, DART snagged \$12 million to cover costs of its new fleet of Compressed Natural Gas powered buses, which will begin arriving late this year and continue over the next three years as the agency replaces its entire fleet.

That order, for more than \$200 million, will bring about 450 new buses to DART's system, and will be a mix of traditional large buses with new, smaller vehicles for use on less-populated routes. It was billed as the largest order of CNG-fueled buses in the country.

I've asked DART whether the \$12 million grant had been baked into the budget already, or whether the new money means that DART can now spend \$12 million it had planned to use for the buses on something else. I'll let you know when I hear.



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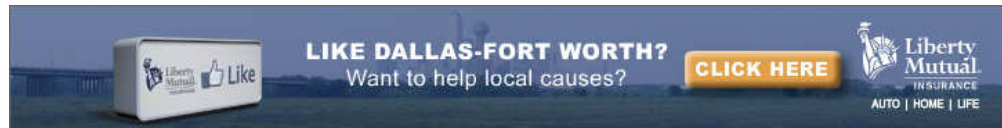
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Dallas-area drivers lead the state in deadly road rage

By CHRISTINA ROSALES

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Published: 20 July 2012 03:46 PM

Young drivers, in construction-heavy, rush-hour traffic, are paying little heed to Texas' motto of friendship.

They're the chief cause for making Dallas and Tarrant counties combined the worst place for road rage crashes statewide over the last five years, statistics show.

The accident-prone hot spots locally include Interstate 635, the spaghetti mix of highways near downtown Dallas and Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

Although road rage incidents represent a small part of the overall number of accidents, law enforcement officers, highway engineers and researchers are looking for more ways to keep drivers from overreacting — and avoiding the often deadly results.

"Our signs on the roadway say 'Drive Friendly' ... but sometimes we forget our common courtesy," said Lonny Haschel, a Department of Public Safety spokesman.

Road rage — defined as an assault with a motor vehicle or a weapon during or after a car crash — is yet another concern among safety advocates who have pressed for limits on cellphone use by drivers, texting and other distractions.

Between 2007 and 2011, law officers cited road rage as a contributing factor in more than 4,500 crashes, according to Texas Department of Transportation statistics.

Dallas County leads all other urban areas in fatal road rage accidents — five in the last five years.

Among them: Dia Gonzalez's brother, Chris Soliz, a driver caught in a road rage altercation on Christmas Eve 2008 in Richardson.

That day, around 4 p.m., according to a police report, a 40-year-old man driving a Pontiac G6 had been trying to keep a 19-year-old man in a black Jaguar from passing him.

The two cars reached speeds of up to 80 mph on Arapaho Road near Plano Road. Soliz was leaving his apartment on Jupiter Road in Richardson to go Christmas shopping.

The G6 broadsided him as Soliz turned left. The Jaguar driver lost control and left the road, hurtling over grass, sidewalks and bushes into a shopping center parking lot.

The drivers were "involved in a road-rage disturbance and traveled at an unsafe speed in a reckless manner," police said.

Soliz, airlifted from the scene, was pronounced dead at Baylor University Medical Center.

Gonzalez said retaliation might be the gut response on the road, but "you have to resist."

Her daughter, Natalie, now 6, believes her Uncle Chris lives on the moon and makes it shiny.

The drivers faced manslaughter charges and later pleaded guilty to lesser charges, Gonzalez said.

"You can't say you've never been angry when you're driving," said Gonzalez, of Keller. "Of course, you don't act on it. You're playing with someone's life if you do."

'Aggressive driving'

Authorities have discretion to classify an accident's cause as road rage when writing reports.

Based on those in the Texas Department of Transportation database, Dallas County had about 180,000 traffic accidents in the last five years, and 329 involved road rage. Tarrant County had 559 crashes attributed to road rage out of more than 130,000 accidents.

Together, the neighboring North Texas counties had more road rage crashes than any other area, according to a *San Antonio Express News* analysis of the reports. It also found:

Most road rage crashes statewide occurred between 4 and 7 p.m., the height of rush hour.

A third of all drivers accused of road rage were in their 20s, responsible for more accidents than any other age group.

San Antonio's Bexar County reported more road rage accidents, 680, than any other single county.

Often, aggressive driving is a catalyst for road rage, but the two are different, said Lt. Scott Bratcher with the Dallas Police Department's traffic division.

"Aggressive driving is more of an issue. It's the people that are in a hurry that don't care about anybody else," he said.

Bratcher and other officials say it's no surprise that many accidents happen on the interstates around Dallas and near D/FW Airport.

"Those are the freeways here that are subject to congestion and where a lot of people will lose their tempers," Bratcher said.

Seeking deterrents

Congestion also can push drivers over the edge, a risk made greater in North Texas by the current LBJ Freeway construction.

TxDOT's list of most congested roadway segments includes five in North Texas.

Scott Cooner, a Texas Transportation Institute researcher at Texas A&M University, said most drivers consider merging-related issues their biggest frustration.

He and other researchers proposed engineering solutions to make the roads less stressful, including removing bottleneck sections and displaying a sign in a construction zone with lane closures.

The sign reads "merge here, take your turn" and encourages motorists to use all lanes until one or two of them closed. It made drivers less likely to cut one another off, researchers said.

Law enforcement also is trying to prevent road rage altercations.

State troopers and city police — some in unmarked cars — patrol highways to catch speeding and tailgating drivers weaving around traffic.

Officers say that kind of aggressive driving often sparks road rage and can be prevented with extra police presence.

If you're confronted, the DPS' Haschel said, try not to respond.

"Turn on the classical radio station and go to your peaceful place," he said.

Don't do unto others. If someone cuts you off, don't retaliate.

Be aware of the surroundings and yield to others on freeway entrance ramps.

Plan ahead and leave early. If you know freeways will be jammed, don't go that way.

If someone seems angry, avoid eye contact, stay out of their way and avoid making gestures.

Maintain your vehicle. Check tire pressure, oil life and anything else that could stop your car in the middle of the highway.

The Dallas Morning News asked members of the Twitterverse for their strong thoughts on road rage. Some responses:

@Jimscj8: Dallas traffic is as bad as DC and Los Angeles, 635 is like NASCAR.

@cryslynn: Dallas drivers are VERY aggressive, especially in comparison to other TX cities. I get cut off at least once daily.

@bbirdsingin: Mention how Dallas drivers are the WORST with not using a turn signal.

@Casey_C_Wright: I can't fit into 140 characters how bad Dallas drivers are.



Legal bill for North Texas Tollway Authority board member in FBI probe: \$148,790 and counting

By MICHAEL A. LINDENBERGER

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Published: 21 July 2012 10:02 PM

The federal investigation into possible conflicts of interest among current and former board members of the North Texas Tollway Authority is getting costly for the authority.

Already, legal bills to pay for a private attorney for one of its board members, David Denison, have reached \$148,790, the authority has disclosed.

The investigation continues, as does the NTTA's full cooperation, officials there confirmed Friday.

Denison asked the board in December to cover his legal expenses tied to the investigation.

Denison has said he has done nothing wrong and is cooperating fully. The request to cover his bills is in keeping with state law and board policy. The vote in December carried a caveat, however: If it is shown later that the investigation is tied to conduct by Denison that violates the law or board policies, he will have to reimburse the NTTA.

Denison, a former Lewisville mayor, has not been accused of any wrongdoing. No charges have been filed against anyone in connection with the investigation. The FBI has never said what it is looking for, or even confirmed the investigation.

When the investigation began in October, the NTTA did not announce it to the public. Instead, it disclosed the investigation to investors through an official statement tied to a round of bond sales. It confirmed the investigation when asked about it by *The Dallas Morning News*.

Since then, the authority has declined to comment on the investigation or reveal whom the FBI has approached. Some board members and other officials have said they have been approached, but details about the conversations have not been made public.

The silence was so deep, in fact, it was not clear whether the investigation had continued beyond October.

But, on June 8, in a 317-page official statement to investors related to a new round of \$409.6 million in bond sales, the NTTA said for the first time that the investigation has continued.

"In October 2011, the Federal Bureau of Investigation interviewed several officials of the authority regarding any knowledge the officials may have concerning the conduct of certain current and former board members, including possible conflicts of interests pertaining to authority business," the statement reads.

"The authority has no reason to believe that it is the target of the investigation or that the investigation will [damage the NTTA's ability to make its debt payments]. The investigation is ongoing and the authority is cooperating fully with the FBI. There can be no assurance that the investigation will be limited to the matters described above or that the authority will not become a target at a later date."

The bond disclosure statement, required as part of the process, would ordinarily already be posted to the NTTA's website, but that hasn't yet happened.

The News discovered the document on a third-party site aimed at bond investors and confirmed its contents with the NTTA.

Spokeswoman Susan Slupecki said the NTTA is simply running behind schedule and will soon upload the document to its site.

She said the NTTA would not comment further, however, because the FBI has instructed officials not to comment about the investigation.

In a statement Friday, she said: "The NTTA has cooperated fully with the FBI. Consistent with that cooperation it will not comment on the FBI investigation beyond what it has disclosed in its official statements."

Since Denison asked the board to cover his legal bills in December, Slupecki said, NTTA chairman Kenneth Barr has also asked the authority to cover his legal bills. That request, however, is pending.

Barr, who has not been questioned by the FBI, has only had \$400 in legal bills associated with the matter, she said.

"In his role as the new chairman of the board, Chairman Barr consulted with legal counsel to be prepared should he be contacted by the FBI. Chairman Barr has not been contacted by FBI."



Irving's hopes riding high on long-awaited Orange Line light rail

By BRANDON FORMBY

Staff Writer

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Published: 21 July 2012 11:06 PM

When DART's Orange Line finally opens to riders next week, the light-rail trains will also carry Irving's hopes for its economic future and DART's biggest chance to prove mass transit's worth to car-loving North Texans.

The light-rail expansion opening July 30 is the first of three phases of the Orange Line's eventual 14-mile run from Bachman Station in northwest Dallas, through Irving and into Terminal A of Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

For all the hoopla at opening events this week, the three new Irving stations aren't expected to dramatically boost ridership. But that hasn't tempered excitement from regional planners who see the eventual airport tie-in as a turning point in selling North Texans on public transportation.

"At the end of the day, if we don't give them a transportation choice, we're guaranteeing they're not going to change what they're doing today," said Gary Thomas, the agency's president and executive director.

No other DART city has paid so much while waiting so long for light rail than Irving, which gave up the Dallas Cowboys and contributed more than \$1 billion to ensure it got trains. But in many ways, being late to the gate has given Irving time to lay economic development groundwork that could make it a model for transit-oriented development in North Texas.

"In Irving, they were a little ahead of the curve," said Thomas.

The city contributed tens of millions of dollars worth of work, land acquisition and money to bring the line into its Las Colinas Urban Center. Officials hope the Orange Line is the final ingredient that will make the unique but often troubled area reach its potential.

"Something's just got to get it started," said Maura Gast, executive director of the Irving Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Sacrifices for DART

For Irving, the Orange Line is the physical evidence of its all-in bet that light-rail service would be a better identity-maker and economic development-incubator than the Dallas Cowboys. America's Team stopped playing in the city in 2008, at least partially because Irving voters in 1996 refused to eliminate the city's 1 percent sales tax contribution to DART to instead possibly fund Texas Stadium renovations.

Leaders hope the two new stations in the heart of Irving's skyscraper-lined, lakefront Urban Center will now give North Texans a new impression of the city whose image is often tied to the aging State Highway 183 corridor.

"There are a lot of assets people don't know about," said Chris Wallace, president and CEO of the Greater Irving-Las Colinas Chamber of Commerce.

Irving officials have long believed in the Urban Center's potential. The area houses more than 6.3 million square feet of office space, 3,500 multifamily residential units, 1,000 hotel rooms and 240 single-family residences.

DART initially planned to bypass the area on the route to the airport. Irving officials lobbied the agency and eventually agreed to cover most of the estimated \$90 million cost to change the alignment to run through the middle of the Urban Center. That is in addition to the more than \$922 million Irving has paid in required sales tax contributions since 1984.

"It was very unfair," said Joe Putnam, Irving's most-tenured City Council member. "DART was unreasonable, but that's what Irving had to do to get the rail line where it is today."

Urban Center

The Urban Center has always been planned to evolve into a fully developed, pedestrian-friendly business and residential area akin to any bustling downtown. But multiple recessions, a high tax rate from a flood-control district and strict rules from property owners' group Las Colinas Association have tamped down some of its growth potential through the decades.

Urban Center workers complain that there aren't enough restaurants within walking distance of their office buildings. Residents yearn for nightlife.

City officials spent \$37 million developing a Las Colinas entertainment complex to fill some of the void. But earlier this year, they learned they can't afford to finance the \$170 million they intended to contribute. The \$252 million entertainment project's fate now is uncertain.

Still, the Urban Center's daily population of more than 30,000 people is a built-in density that's rare for new suburban light-rail stations. Irving's chamber estimates that new development planned over the next five to 10 years will increase the average weekday population to more than 50,000 people. A larger share of those people — about one-third instead of one-quarter — will be apartment dwellers.

"Once we get more and more residents, we'll get more and more retail," Wallace said.

Many connections

Officials see potential. They have spent more than \$3.5 million building a pedestrian promenade around the perimeter of Lake Carolyn. It's unfinished but already connects the Las Colinas Urban Center Station to apartment complexes, Mandalay Canal and office buildings.

The taxing entity that controls Las Colinas waterways plans to connect the long misunderstood Las Colinas Area Personal Transit people-mover system to the Orange Line next year. The entity will then expand service to 12 hours each weekday. DART has already built a connector platform at the Urban Center station.

Irving is also planning to partially finance a hotel to support the \$133 million Irving Convention Center at Las Colinas, whose namesake station is one of the three opening July 30.

Several other private projects are also in the works throughout the Urban Center and elsewhere along the Orange Line. The city hopes to one day sell the old Texas Stadium site if an ambitious development is proposed. In all, about \$2 billion worth of transit-oriented development projects are planned in the city.

"If they do it right, do it with the right partners, it can be a great opportunity for their community," said Plano Mayor Phil Dyer, who credits the DART Red Line with jumpstarting the nightlife in his city's old downtown area.

Next: airport service

About 74,400 people used DART light-rail stations on any given weekday in May, the most recent month data was available. About 2,000 people are expected to use the three new Irving stations on weekdays by August 2013.

DART supporters are optimistic that those numbers will be boosted with the connection to the airport, scheduled for December 2014.

"You're no longer looking at just your population, but you're looking at everybody flying into the area," said Irving Mayor Beth Van Duynes.

Supporters also say the airport service, more stops and new development around stations will better lure to rail a North Texas population that is expected to dramatically outgrow its highway system. In turn, that will help DART fulfill the mission that fueled its 1983 creation.

"We cannot concrete over everything and just build roads," said state Rep. Linda Harper-Brown, R-Irving, whose political career was born from her support of DART in Irving's 1996 withdrawal election. "We have to have other modes of transportation."

AT A GLANCE: Saturday opening celebrations

5 p.m. — Parade starting at the corner of Las Colinas Boulevard and Lake Carolyn Parkway

5 to 9 p.m. — Station celebrations at the Bachman Station, 9739 Denton Drive; University of Dallas Station, 1951 E. John Carpenter Freeway; Las Colinas Urban Center Station, 890 Lake Carolyn Parkway

JULY 30 REGULAR SERVICE

University of Dallas Station

First Arrival: 4:12 a.m.

First Departure: 4:31 a.m.

Las Colinas Urban Center Station

First Arrival: 4:18 a.m.

First Departure: 4:34 a.m.

Irving Convention Center Station

First Arrival: 4:21 a.m.

First Departure: 4:40 a.m.

For a full schedule of the new Orange Line service, visit dart.org.

Source: DART

TIMELINE: Light-rail service to Irving

August 1983: Voters in Dallas County and 14 cities, including Irving, agree to create Dallas Area Rapid Transit.

January 1984: Member cities begin collecting an extra 1 percent sales tax for DART.

October 1988: The South Irving Transit Center opens.

May to August 1989: Six cities hold elections to decide whether or not to stay in DART. Carrollton, Irving, Plano and Rowlett stay. Coppell and Flower Mound withdraw.

October 1989: DART board members agree to buy or lease several rights of way for future rail lines. The operating rights for a 2-mile spur moving west from Mañana Road and Northwest Highway would have Irving's future line run near — but not through — the Las Colinas Urban Center.

June 1996: Light-rail service debuts as DART opens 11.2 miles of its 20-mile starter system.

August 1996: Carrollton, Irving, Plano and Rowlett hold withdrawal elections. Voters in all four cities decide to stay. The most bitter battle — and slimmest margin — is in Irving. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones spends at least \$500,000 in a failed attempt to persuade Irving voters to withdraw. He wanted to use some of the 1 percent sales tax dedicated to DART to renovate Texas Stadium.

December 1996: A 10-mile segment of the new Trinity Railway Express commuter rail service between Dallas and Irving opens.

May 1997: The agency's 20-mile light rail starter system is completed.

December 1999: Irving officials intensify their lobbying of DART to run the planned light-rail line south near Texas Stadium and the University of Dallas before running through the Las Colinas Urban Center. DART officials say changing the alignment will cost \$90 million more than budgeted.

February 2000: DART and Irving officials reach an agreement under which the city will cover most of the costs of changing the alignment.

November 2000: The West Irving station opens on the Trinity Railway Express line.

2002: Richardson, Garland and Plano get light-rail service.

December 2007: DART officials say it will cost almost twice as much to build the Orange Line as initially believed. They say they may delay the line, cut or delay some stations or scrap other expansion plans throughout the system. Irving officials criticize the transit agency for the surprise \$900 million shortfall.

January 2008: DART officials say they can deliver the Orange Line and Rowlett's Blue Line expansion, but only if it cuts \$350 million for other projects in downtown Dallas and south Oak Cliff.

May 2009: Irving officials are again enraged at DART after the transit agency says it may not tie the Orange Line directly into D/FW Airport. The agency says it is exploring whether to end the line at the Cotton Belt line in Grapevine and run a shuttle into the airport. Grapevine has never been a DART member city.

June 2009: The DART board approves a plan that ties the Orange Line directly into an airport terminal. The plan calls for an additional loop that will later connect the Orange Line, Cotton Belt and airport.

December 2010: A 23-mile, 15-station expansion of the Green Line connects southeast Dallas, downtown, West Dallas, northwest Dallas, Farmers Branch and Carrollton. The Lake Highlands Station also debuts on the Blue Line.

July 30: Irving, which has contributed more than \$1 billion in sales tax revenues and other concessions to DART, will get rail service as three stations in the city open on the new Orange Line extension.

December: Irving will get two more stations as the Orange Line extends to the Belt Line station. Buses will meet the trains and take passengers directly to the airport.

December 2014: The final leg of the Orange Line, which will run from Belt Line to the airport, is slated to open.

Source: DMN Research; DART