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

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By [Michael Lindemberger](#)  
[mlindemberger@dallasnews.com](mailto:mlindemberger@dallasnews.com)  
 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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## Dallas-area drivers lead the state in deadly road rage

By CHRISTINA ROSALES

Staff Writer

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

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

Transportation Writer

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

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."