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## NTTA pilot program would 'ban' violators from toll roads

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Published: Monday, September 10, 2012 6:49 PM CDT

A North Texas Tollway Authority proposal that would allow Texas DPS troopers to tow top toll violators off of NTTA roads will be up for approval at the agency's Sept. 19 board meeting.

The pilot program would first send notices to drivers with more than 100 outstanding tolls going back six or more months to appear in an administrative hearing court, where they could settle or appeal the charges.

If violators ignore notices, an order would be issued banning their vehicle from NTTA roadways. Texas Department of Public Safety troopers would enforce the order by towing and impounding the vehicles of violators if they are pulled over for any other reason.

"We want to make sure that we are doing everything we can to collect these past-due tolls, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because it's the fair thing to do for those people who pay with no [issues] whatsoever," said Michael Rey, NTTA spokesman.

The idea was approved by the board's customer service, projects and operations committee Thursday. If given full board approval, the program will go live in November, Rey said.

"It's a pilot plan to see if we think it's effective, but [board approval] would authorize the beginning of that pilot plan," he said.

The agency has worked in conjunction with the Texas DPS to make sure all legal requirements are met with regard to the proposed rules and will likely hire a judge to conduct the hearings, Rey said.

"It would not be anyone who's ever had any business or association with NTTA. It would be a neutral party in that regard," he said.

The idea is the latest in NTTA's efforts to crack down on toll violators. In July, the agency released the names of more than 25,500 top toll violators, who together owed NTTA more than \$17 million. The most recent list, released Friday, named 33,135 violators.

As of Aug. 31, Rey said, 1,558 of the top violators have paid \$313,000.

"I don't think we'd go forward if we didn't expect good results," he said. "... It's another opportunity for us to tell them it's not going away, and I think you would see an impact. Some people would be mortified to be pulled over and have their vehicle towed off the roadway."

Another new effort is the submission of more than 6,000 violator names to six law firms for possible civil litigation. The agency is also reaching out to the Texas Legislature this session to ask for the ability to block vehicle registration for any driver on the list, a practice that is already in place in Harris County.

Violators are already pursued by Texas DPS officials in the justice of the peace courts, Rey said.

"We're going forward in every manner that is currently available, and we're asking for some things that we don't think are available so we can do this," he said.

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