



North Texas Tollway Authority turns up heat on toll scofflaws

By ROBERT WILONSKY

Staff Writer

rwilonsky@dallasnews.com

Published: 06 September 2012 10:35 PM



The North Texas Tollway Authority is turning up the heat on the region's worst toll road scofflaws.

A pilot program unanimously approved Thursday by an NTTA committee effectively bans the vehicles of 25,000-plus drivers accused of repeatedly flouting tolls. And how exactly is that accomplished? Spike strips? Tractor beams?

Well, no. The proposed solution is a little more mundane.

NTTA spokesman Michael Rey says the plan, which the board will consider Sept. 19, will work like this:

If you are on the naughty list, you'll be notified of an administrative hearing, at which point you'll be given one more chance to pay what you owe. Not that most debtors are likely to show up. All of them already have more than 100 outstanding violations and six months' worth of chances to pay up, including 16 mailed warnings.

"If they were to not appear for the hearing, or found to be a repeat toll violator, we'd issue a ban," Rey said.

In other words, any Texas Department of Public Safety trooper who pulls you over on an area toll road could immediately tow and impound your car.

"Everyday toll users want people to make sure people join them in paying the tolls, and we're doing everything we can to collect these tolls," Rey said.

As of Monday, he said, just 1,558 out of more than 25,000 scofflaws have paid their tolls and attendant fines.

"That's in excess of \$313,000," he said.

In all, those on the list of shame owe more than \$300 million, most of which are late fees associated with unpaid tolls.

The NTTA's not out of collection options, either.

Earlier this week, the agency sent 6,000 randomly selected names on the list to six law firms, which can either make more collection calls or file lawsuits on the toll road authority's behalf. That has yet to be determined, Rey said. The NTTA is also going to ask the state Legislature for the power to ban vehicle registration for repeat violators.

Rey added that a new scofflaw list would be published Friday. Sitting at the No. 1 spot will no doubt be that familiar name — Amber Young.

NTTA has said the poster child of toll debtors owes \$180,000.

"But, no, we're not going to call the ban 'The Amber Young Rule,'" Rey says when it's offered as a suggestion, since she still continues to drive toll roads without paying for the privilege.

"Anyone on the list of top toll violators, the rule applies to them as well," he said. "I think she's unaware of the seriousness with which we're going after top violators. This is just to put in place a process where we could ban them. We see in the comments of a *Dallas Morning News* article, for instance, where someone will write, 'When they drive the toll road, pull them over, case closed.' Were it that simple. We wish it were."

Instituting the ban, he says, "could be a lengthy process, but over time we see it as being effective."

