



After years of construction and the traffic congestion it created, the first phase of LBJ Freeway's \$2.7 billion expansion will debut next weekend when new toll lanes open to drivers. (Lara Solt/Staff Photographer)

TRANSPORTATION

Sky's the limit for new toll prices

Fluctuating tolls will greet drivers as first section in LBJ's mega-makeover reopens for its 240,000 daily commuters

WRITTEN BY
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A new era in Texas transportation dawns next weekend when area drivers finally get to use the first stretch of LBJ Freeway's \$2.7 billion expansion.

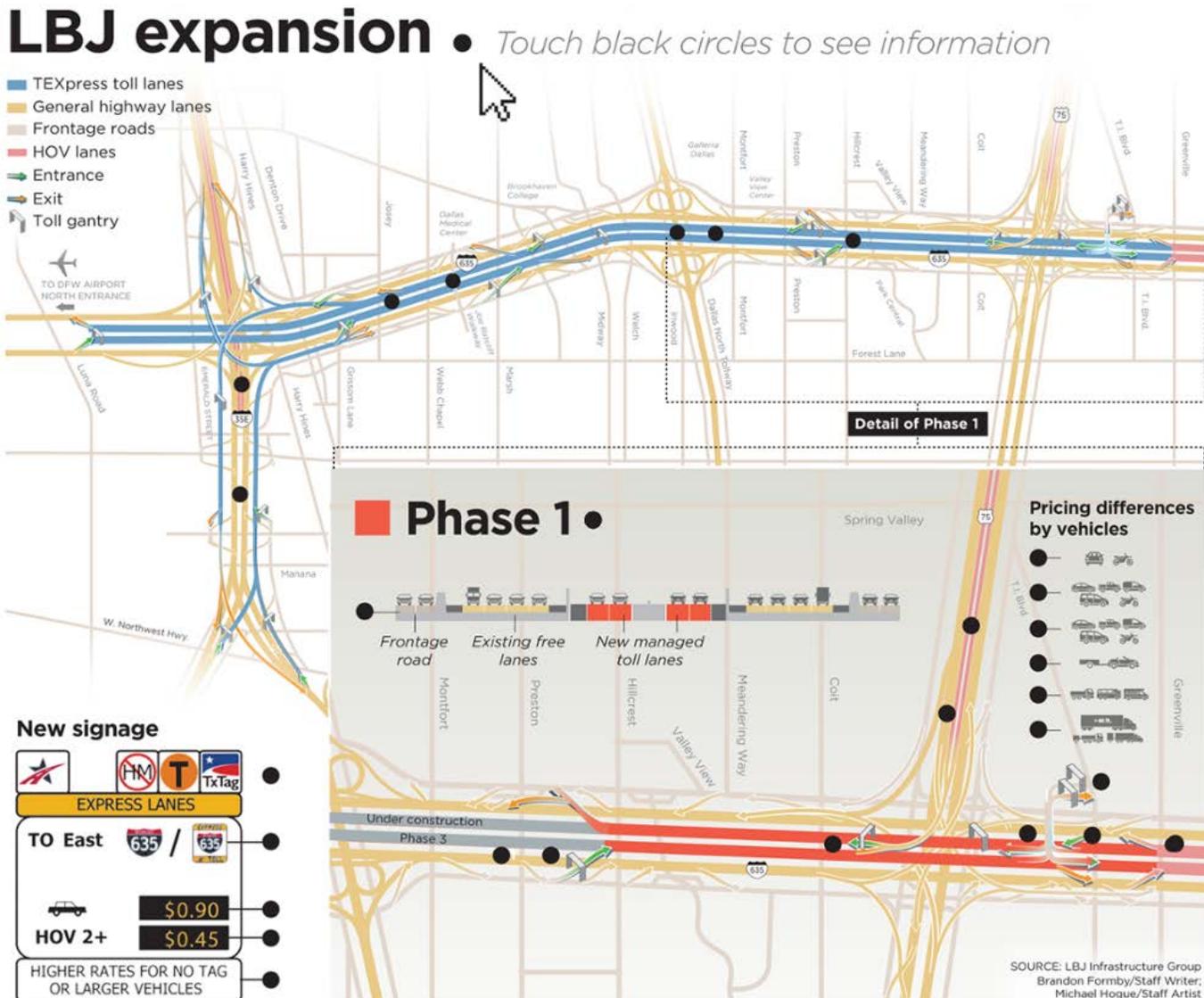
The 3.2-mile section between Preston Road and Greenville Avenue will introduce the state to fluctuating toll prices. But that's not all drivers will have to get used to.

The addition of tolled lanes alongside rebuilt and redesigned free lanes will also force drivers to make some new decisions — and navigate some potentially tricky travel spots.

State officials and project developers admit there will be some learning curves. But they say everything is designed to improve traffic on what's long been one of North Texas' most dreaded corridors. The second phase will open in the spring. The entire project will be complete by December 2015.

The highway was originally built to handle 180,000 cars a day. More than 240,000 drivers currently use it daily.

"With those numbers projected to double in the coming decade, I-635 had to be expanded to relieve traffic congestion, but in a way that would preserve the thriving neighborhoods and businesses surrounding the roadway," said Antonio Alvarez-Cedron, CEO of developer LBJ Infrastructure Group.



Plans for expanding the east-west highway in North Dallas began more than 20 years ago and initially called for 24 lanes. That would have required extensive real estate acquisitions and major renovations to interchanges with Interstate 35E, Dallas North Tollway and Central Expressway.

Dallas city officials asked the Texas Department of Transportation not to make LBJ any higher or wider than it already was. At one point, the state agency envisioned burrowing a tunnel beneath existing lanes. But that came with an astronomical price tag.

“It just got prohibitively expensive,” said Tony Hartzel, a spokesman for TxDOT.

Even though the agency scaled back its vision, money remained a factor. TxDOT for years has wrestled with funding problems largely brought on by a growing population’s increased demand and the Texas Legislature’s reluctance to increase gas taxes.

So the agency partnered with a private developer to pay for LBJ’s expansion. LBJ Infrastructure, which will operate the highway for 52 years, financed the bulk of construction costs, with TxDOT paying for the remainder. Money collected from the new tolled lanes will be used to pay back that \$2.13 billion investment.

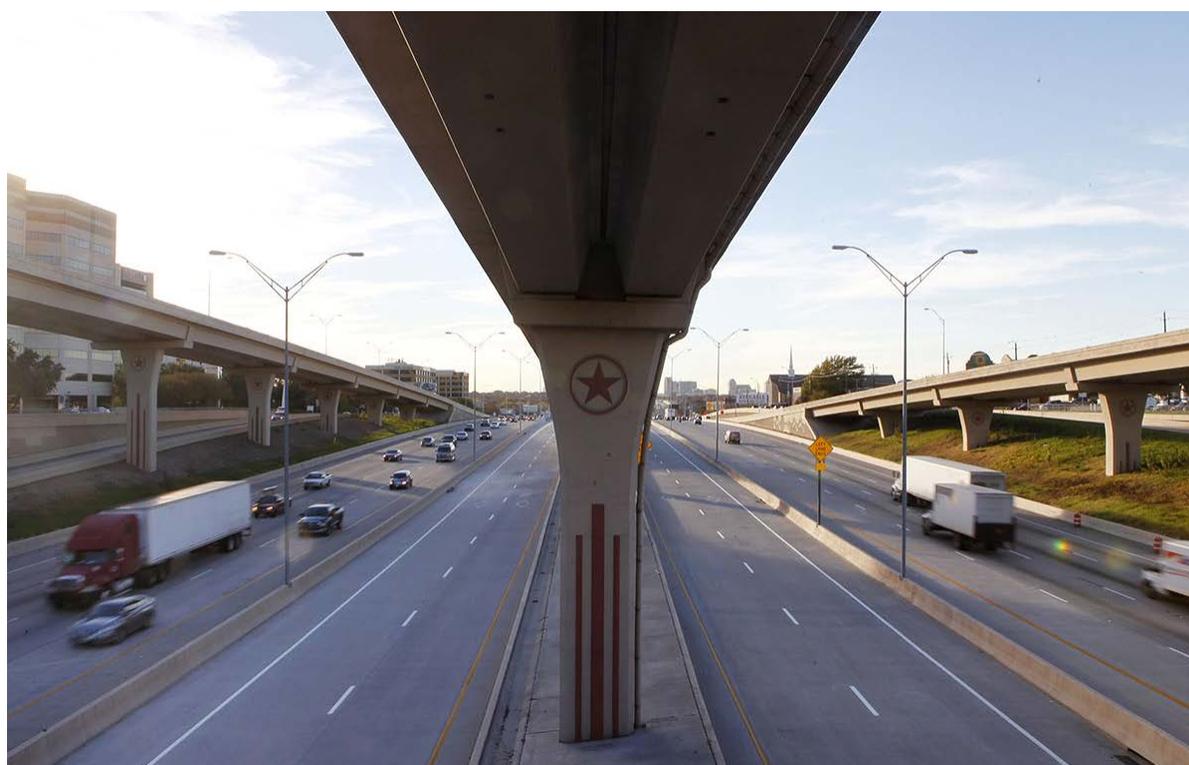
“There’s no way TxDOT could come up with that amount of money without seriously affecting the cash flow of other projects statewide,” Hartzel said.

Fluctuating tolls

The lanes opening next Saturday around LBJ’s interchange with Central Expressway are tolled lanes that run parallel to the reconstructed main lanes, which remain free. They are dubbed TEXpress lanes and the cost to use them will fluctuate. The concept is called dynamic pricing. Electronic signs recently installed will display the prices at the time of entry.

To ease drivers into the TEXpress concept, prices on LBJ will be capped during the first six months. The most a driver with a TollTag will initially pay to drive that stretch is 95 cents. The cheapest amount is 15 cents. The prices will be based on time of day during the transition period.

After drivers are more accustomed to the concept, LBJ Infrastructure will begin altering prices based on traffic conditions. And there will be no cap on how high the rates could be.



The traffic-free new toll lanes are just days from opening for business. (Lara Solt/Staff Photographer)

Going with the flow

The way the toll rates will eventually fluctuate could seem counterintuitive. That's because the more traffic there is in the tolled lanes, the higher the cost to use them. Higher prices are expected to decrease the number of drivers wanting to jump on, thus thinning out traffic.

Once the cap on the toll prices is removed, drivers will be given a guarantee of sorts that they'll at least move at 50 mph. Motorists who don't end up averaging at least 35 mph will receive a rebate on what they're charged — but only in some instances. Situations that are out of the operator's control, like a car accident, won't trigger a rebate.

Dynamic pricing will soon spread. It will be used on other highway expansions, including Interstate 35E and the DFW Connector.

"It's a different way to manage the various reasons for travel in overly congested urban corridors in North Texas," Alvarez-Cedron said.

Starting slow

While LBJ Freeway will be the first in Texas with tolled express lanes, the general concept is already in use elsewhere in the country. LBJ Infrastructure Group employees visited many of them. Interstate 495 in Fairfax County, Va., has charged up to \$9.75 for a 14-mile stretch. That project taught LBJ planners a valuable lesson about communicating with the public.

"We learned to start slow with the tolls and to make a big push in terms of education," said Robert Hinkle, corporate affairs director for the developer.

He and his colleagues also studied California's State Route 91 in the Los Angeles area. That road's tolled lanes have only one entrance and exit. Toll prices there are updated every three months based on average traffic volumes, Hinkle said.

"We've gathered a lot of useful info to validate our algorithms," he said.

LBJ officials also looked at how traffic is managed and tolls are priced on Interstate 95 in Florida.

"They also allowed us to learn how their algorithm works and take ideas for ours," Hinkle said.

Citing proprietary information, local officials are tight-lipped about what some of the data show and how the algorithms work.

New decisions

Motorists who plan to use LBJ Freeway's new tolled lanes should be aware of some areas requiring unfamiliar decisions or maneuvers. Because the TEXpress lanes replaced LBJ's old HOV lanes, there are some changes in its connections to Central Expressway.

In the mornings, people driving from Central's southbound HOV lane to westbound LBJ will have to decide whether they want to use the new tolled lanes.

AT A GLANCE | THE NEW LBJ

What: Open house for the LBJ Freeway expansion and new tolled lanes

When: 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday

Where: Park Central 9 Building, 7th Floor, 12790 Merit Drive, Dallas

LBJ Express

LBJ Freeway is undergoing a \$2.7 billion reconstruction that includes tolled lanes, rebuilt main lanes that will remain free, and redone access roads. The project will roll out in three major phases:

■ **Saturday, Dec. 14:** From Preston Road to Greenville Avenue

■ **Spring:** LBJ interchange with Interstate 35E

■ **December 2015:** Luna Road to Preston Road

TEXpress in North Texas

Texans are about to be introduced to fluctuating toll prices. The concept is meant to manage traffic flow and, like previous toll roads, help finance needed construction projects. These five highway projects will have tolled TEXpress lanes in addition to reconstructed main lanes that will remain free:

■ LBJ Freeway

The HOV flyover connects directly to the TEXpress lanes, so those who don't mind paying won't have a problem. But those who want to use LBJ's free lanes will have to exit Central Expressway and sit through a light at Coit Road before getting onto the freeway.

- DFW Connector
- Interstate 35E
- Interstate 35W
- State Highways 121 and 183

In the evenings, only HOV drivers going from eastbound LBJ to northbound Central should use the tolled lanes. The connector from those lanes puts drivers in Central's northbound HOV lane, which doesn't offer an exit until Parker Road in Plano.

Eastbound drivers who don't have any passengers and want to go north on Central should stay in the main lanes and use the High Five interchange as usual.

The eastbound LBJ exit for Hillcrest could also cause some confusion, at least initially. That exit will be used by people wanting to leave the highway and get on the frontage road. But it also will be used by people who want to get from the free lanes into the tolled lanes. One-tenth of a mile after the exit is the entrance to the tolled lanes, so frontage road drivers willing to pay to drive also will be maneuvering through that area.

"That traffic should sort itself out within a couple weeks, but it's going to be a learning curve, I bet," Hartzel said.



Construction crews installed signs overnight last week along I-635 for the new tolled lanes. (Sarah Hoffman/Staff Photographer)

Free lanes

Even drivers who don't want to use the tolled lanes could benefit. With extra lanes for other drivers, the free main lanes should conceivably have fewer cars. Plus, the construction project gave engineers an opportunity to rebuild and update existing free lanes and frontage roads.

"Roads were built differently 50 years ago, both from a material and safety standpoint," Hinkle said.

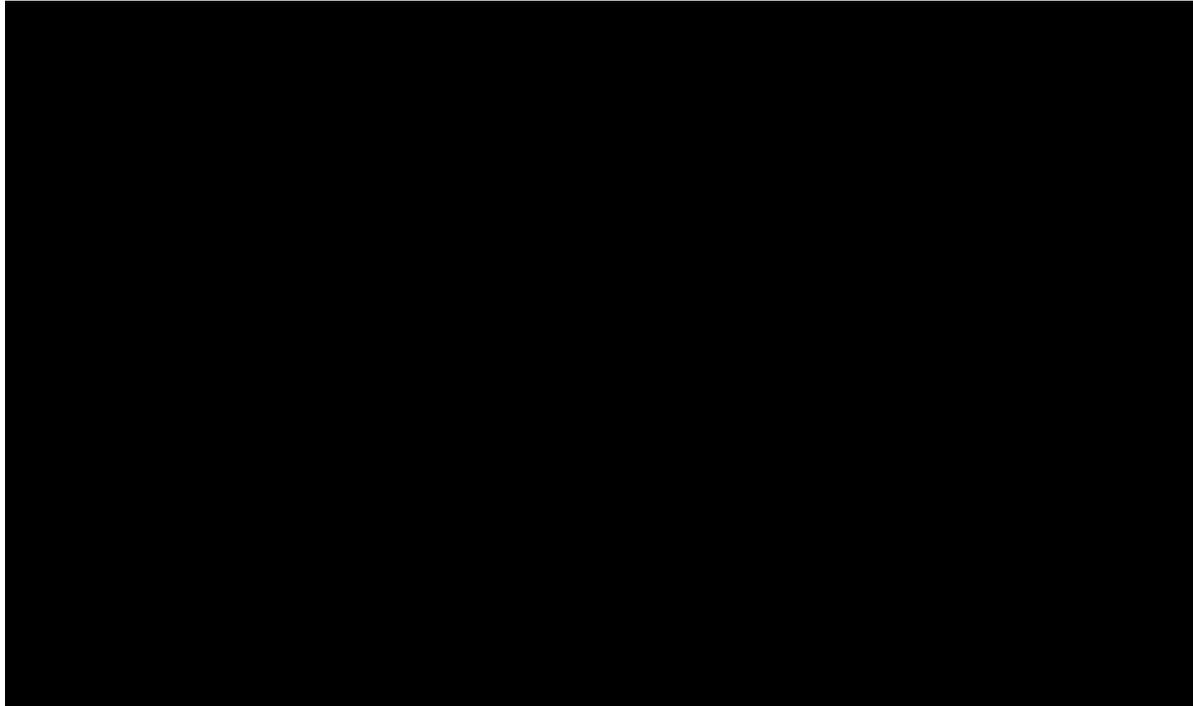
Shoulders are now wider, frontage roads have at least two lanes and bypass lanes take drivers over intersections they don't plan to use.

In many ways, next Saturday's opening will also be eye-opening for transportation planners. This will be the

first time they get to test their hypotheses about how North Texas drivers react to all the changes. What they learn will be pertinent when LBJ Infrastructure starts controlling the toll prices next year in its bid to manage traffic flow.

“Everybody’s going to be watching this to see what the behavior of the traffic is,” Hinkle said. ■

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Anonymous 15 hours ago

If 250,000 drivers (the full daily usage of LDJ today) a day used the new toll lanes and were charged \$1 per day for the usage, it would take 22 years to pay back the \$2.13 billion without interest. I guessing that they will end up charging a lot more than \$1 per usage.

I'm sure that the money came from the Rothschild banking cartel, because who else has that kind of money. Besides Rick Perry has been cozy with the One World Government group for some time, and the mystery corporation which was to fund the states toll roads was based in Spain.

Since most of the worlds sovereign debt (including the United States) is owed to the Rothschild Family owned Central banks; and those governments are tapped out (sorry for those who thought it was China that owned the debt). I guess this is one of the new ways that they grease the world's economy.

In other words, that section of road will never be paid off. The Rothschild family can do this because they simply print up the money they loan out. However, the toll money is real money which in addition to all of the other income streams will keep that multi trillionaire family rolling in the dough.

Reply [▼ 1 reply](#) 0 2

Unlisted · 5 hours ago

"The Rothschild cartel?" OMG, what 1940s, anti-Semitic weird conspiracy group did you get this nonsense from? What a joke! Can't believe the DMN editors haven't yanked it.. Guess you've never heard of Citi, Chase, Bank of America, and the other institutions that are the largest in the world. And guess they didn't teach you in elementary school that it's governments that print money, not families, even in Europe.

Reply 1 0

Jeff Hayden 1 day ago

People complain that there is too much traffic. Then they complain about the road construction that is there to eventually help solve the traffic problem. Then they complain about the completed project.

Reply 0 1

David Taffet 1 day ago

I'm not going to watch a video to learn how to use a highway. I'll avoid the whole damn mess they created.

Reply 1 0

Tim Thompson 2 days ago

What a God awful mess of ideas and costs

Reply 4 1

Brenda Roberts 2 days ago

The whole idea of toll roads, except maybe at the airport where you are going into a particular location that they built a specific road for is ridiculous to me. As for the guy that says we do not pay taxes for our roads, I believe he is wrong. There is or at least use to be even listed on your car registration road and bridge tax. Also part of the taxes for city, county, state, which would be everything you buy that gets taxed, is supposed to be part of the roads tax. Just think at how much the gas tax is that should amount to a lot of money there. I think we do already pay for our roads and should not have to pay to be able to pay to drive on them. You know all of us are not rich and can not afford to pay high gas prices and tolls .Some of you just say don't use them. But if you live where I do, you don't have much of a choice to get to some places or accidently get caught on one.

Reply 2 1

Unlisted · 2 days ago

I remember when they built LBJ/635 my senior year in high school, 1968. Forest Lane was about as far north as civilization went. People kept saying, "Why are they wasting our money building that? What do they need a freeway way out there for?"

Reply [▼ 1 reply](#) 3 0

JulieB 2 days ago

Yeah, and Beltline Road was the "end of civilization" on Central Expressway.

Reply 1 0

Unlisted · 2 days ago

Get rid of ALL HOV lanes on all highways in Dallas! They are severely underused and their initial purpose is an attempted social-engineering joke. No one in Dallas car pools, and the HOV lane is no incentive to do so. There's nothing worse than sitting in a traffic jam and seeing an empty HOV lane next to mine, which is nearly always the case.

Reply [▼ 4 replies](#) 10 0

John Beckett 2 days ago

These sky's-the-limit toll lanes are a response to what you're complaining about. Someone says "why can't I just pay to drive in the HOV lane?" And someone else figures out how to buy the votes to make money on it. And so those with the money get to drive at 50 MPH, the rest of us get to sit in traffic jams, and the original purpose of the HOV lanes - to reduce congestion and pollution - is forgotten.

Reply [▼ 3 replies](#) 1 1

Unlisted · 1 day ago

But the problem is that even with adding toll lanes, THEY'RE STILL GOING TO HAVE HOV LANES. WHICH IS TOTALLY NUTS!

Reply [▼ 2 replies](#) 2 0

Unlisted · 1 day ago

Just look at the sign in the photo accompanying the story. There are toll "Express Lanes" and "HOV 2+" lanes, as well. That makes for even more of a ridiculous nightmare!

Reply 2 0

Paul Nufer 1 day ago

That does seem nuts. On the Capital Beltway (I-495) in Virginia, the express) lanes are the HOV lanes. If you have 3 or more in your vehicle and an E-ZPass flex transponder, no toll is charged for using the

express lanes.
Reply 0 0

Randell Weatherall 2 days ago
we choose politicians in this state that choose to continue to underfund transportation, while continuing to move further and further out, then we complain about there being tollways. We simply can't have it both ways, and this is the result.
Reply 7 1

AdamsonScott1 2 days ago
I refuse to use the toll roads since there is not an option to stop at a toll booth and pay cash. I refuse to get the government tracking chip or be sent tracking statements by the government.
Reply 6 2

A M 2 days ago
Hell NO. Never will I pay tolls when I already pay taxes for this purpose. Let fools and their money part.
Reply 4 replies 7 4

Carl Cezon 2 days ago
Really? Since when are you "already pay(ing) taxes for this purpose"? No Virginia, you are not paying taxes to build freeways in Texas. That's why TXDOT is currently converting paved roads into graded gravel to save on re-surfacing costs. That's why TXDOT is trying to "gift" state highways to municipalities (like Preston Road) so city taxpayers, not TXDOT, take over the maintenance. The legislature is dominated by something-for-nothing Tea Party Republicans. They demand their "free" ways like it's some kind of birthright entitlement but refuse to pay for them. So here we are with an underfunded TXDOT and a Spanish contractor making a chunk-o-change on building tollways.
Reply 3 replies 6 4

Gary 2 days ago
Sad part about this is the same ones will get voted into office by the same people griping about what is going on with the toll roads. Why can't Texas vote these guys out and stop funding these kinds of projects. They get in office and make laws to help themselves look good and make their money and could care less about us! These kinds of things need to stop even if it means changing the party you are voting in just to stop some of this stuff! If you don't like the other party's stuff then vote them out but keeping the same people in for years is getting Texas to the very lowest point in history! Why not work on education in this state instead of toll roads?
Reply 1 reply 2 1

Gary 2 days ago
Because education won't pad the politicians pockets like toll roads!
Reply 2 2

Garrison Griffin 2 days ago
Carl, clearly you are NOT from Texas or you would know that TXDOT gets its funding from TAXPAYERS!
Reply 3 3

Bill Betzen 2 days ago
This flexible toll application has tremendous potential to also redirect away from currently congested areas, such as downtown Dallas, traffic that is often just driving through downtown for the view instead of driving around Dallas on trips like Florida to Amarillo.

We need to do everything possible to avoid building the river bottom toll road that appears to still be on the books. It would destroy the potential world class park still possible with our greatest natural resource, the Trinity.
Reply 1 reply 2 1

Andrew diBenedetto 18 hours ago
This very well could be my naïvety as a result of living in the city, but do people really purposefully drive into congested areas for the view?? I know when I'm on road trips, I always try to take whatever bypasses are available around large cities.
Reply 0 0

Manda Moore 3 days ago
Great. This is one of the only things I miss about living in the DC region -- the ability to pay my way out of traffic. I also doubt that these tolls will get as high as the ones in Fairfax -- the cost of living in Dallas is so much lower that it wouldn't make sense to match northern Virginia in tolls. But hell, even if they do...I'll still pay it. This toll system has made a 2 hour rush hour commute on 495 only take 50 minutes (which would be equal to the 'middle of the night' commute time), and I value my time at more than \$10/hr.
Reply 3 replies 4 5

Susan Wansbrough 2 days ago
That's good for you, but bad for the people who earn less than \$10 an hour.
Reply 2 replies 6 1



Manda Moore 2 days ago

There are people who make \$50 an hour who won't pay it, and there are people who make minimum wage who will. Sure, not everyday, but when you know there's a huge accident on the "regular" lanes, why not? Dallas isn't exactly the poverty stricken capital of America, and the prices aren't really outrageous (especially considering I've paid more in tolls in the 12 months living here than ever in my life), and if you don't like it, don't use it. Trust me, both sides benefit.

Also it's pretty common (in DC) for employees to have their company pay for it. So bam. That's a bunch of people out of your way if you choose to stay in the regular lanes.

But again. The cost of living in Northern VA/DC is about 5x what it is here. An apartment in the ghetto, where people are murdered in your complex, is still at least \$1,200 there. I doubt the prices of tolls will match.

Reply

0 3



Manda Moore 2 days ago

Not to mention, how many people making less than \$10hr own their own vehicle AND routinely sit in 9-5 traffic? Most people making that little don't have regular hours, and absolutely are more likely to pay in (in my guess) that one day a week they open at Macy's during rush hour.

Reply

0 3



Scotty 3 days ago

My question is how long it will take wreckers to negotiate the new lanes if there are K-rails fencing the lanes in? The first wreck will be a congestion nightmare on those lanes.

Reply

6 0



Garrison Griffin 3 days ago

"The addition of tolled lanes alongside rebuilt and redesigned free lanes will also force drivers to make some new decisions — and navigate some potentially tricky travel spots."

Oh Boy! The uninsured motorist crowd is going to have fun in this playground.

Reply

1 1



John Beckett 3 days ago

Welcome to the 21st century - first class service for those able to pay for it, traffic jams for the rest of us. A pox on the spineless legislators who refuse to raise taxes and build the roads we need.

Reply [▼ 7 replies](#)

11 1



Shawn Heidingsfelder 3 days ago

They ARE building roads and raising taxes. This is a "tax upon use" road. If you don't use it, you don't get taxed. You could always carpool if you want to lessen the traffic burden, move closer to work, etc. Suburbanites pay a penalty for moving out of the city.

Reply [▼ 6 replies](#)

6 1



A M 2 days ago

who can afford to live in downtown Dallas? You?

Reply [▼ 2 replies](#)

4 0



David 2 days ago

Thousands of people, actually.

The question is, why would anyone live north of 635?

Reply [▼ 1 reply](#)

2 3



Anonymous 7 hours ago

Schools for your kids.

0 0



John Beckett 2 days ago

Roads are a common resource and a common responsibility. The idea of tiered levels of accommodation in public services is abhorrent.

Reply [▼ 1 reply](#)

3 3



Gary 2 days ago

Still we already pay taxes for roads and shouldn't have to pay another tax to drive on them when they are owned by foreigners but they are still monitored by the cops and DOT.

If you want to get political with all this, it is big brother watching you and is put in place by the moral police.....republicans not democrats!
Reply 4 3

 **Julie B** 2 days ago
Some of us live AND work in the suburbs.
Reply 3 0

 **Ryan Short** 3 days ago
We should do this <http://anewdallas.com/> with LBJ too
Reply 0 0

 **Jerry Holding** 3 days ago
Lets name it the Barbie Doll killer since it empties your wallet.
Reply 3 5

 **Pat Patterson** 3 days ago
Should have done the 24 lanes from the start and no toll lanes or hov lanes.
Reply 9 1

 **Susan Wansbrough** 3 days ago
I won't using them. But for those who choose to tax themselves, go for it.
Reply 8 0

 **bigbossnass00** 3 days ago
\$9.75 to drive a mere 14 miles. This is precisely the kind of revenue the developers of this project are shooting for.
Prepare to see a whole lot more toll scofflaws.
Reply 10 0

 **HAKEEM** 3 days ago
The Sky's the limit alright. There will be no limit to how much they'll charge you...
Reply 7 1

 **Sean Chelsey** 3 days ago
WHY did we name it LBJ after the man who killed more than 54,000 of our brave soldiers in Vietnam. Shame, shame on his whole family.
Reply [6 replies](#) 0 18

 **Susan Wansbrough** 3 days ago
A little late for that now, Sean.
Reply 9 0

 **Jim Horany** 2 days ago
Why did they name a toll road after George Bush, the most moronic President we ever had who killed thousands of Americans and Iraqis and made the Middle East a mess for years to come?
Reply [3 replies](#) 4 5

 **Unlisted .** 2 days ago
Um, wrong President Bush, Jim. Guess that makes your comment moronic.
Reply [2 replies](#) 6 0

 **Gary** 2 days ago
But there is some road in dallas named after GW and I bet it ain't purty! And, GW's daddy was just as bad a president as the son!
Reply [1 reply](#) 0 2

 **Carl Cezon** 2 days ago
Not really Gary. HW was just kind of pathetic; like when he barfed into the lap of the Japanese Prime Minister at a state dinner. But the son usurped our democracy by stealing the 2000 election, used 9/11 as pretext for launching a thinly disguised religious crusade on behalf of his Evangelical friends, and surrounded himself with men and women of the lowest character who easily manipulated his gullibility and childishness. The son put the 'banality' in evil.
1 2

 **James Irvin** 2 days ago
Sean please do get SOS
[Reply](#) 2   0

 **Gary** 3 days ago
People need to stop this. This land is already owned by the state and cannot be used for toll roads according to the law that was passed! WE need to get this bunch of lawmakers out before they break us!
[Reply](#) [▼ 1 reply](#) 8   5

 **Carl Cezon** 2 days ago
The law says that existing freeways cannot be converted into tollways, but toll lanes may be added. You should expect to see toll lanes added to IH-35 in the near future. The refusal of the legislature to set a reasonable tax rate and its insistence on lavishing Corporate Texas with tax giveaways has meant TXDOT is severely under funded. That means more Tollways to serve affluent Exurbanites and commercial logistics. The rest of us get to wait at a light on Coit. What Rick Perry never mentions when he tours the nation touting Texas' alleged great economy is that TXDOT is actually converting paved roads into graded gravel to save money. He really is taking us back to the 19th Century.
[Reply](#) 4   2

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