

# TxDOT, Municipal League strike deal to make state highways' turnover to cities voluntary



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A group representing local Texas governments struck a deal last week with transportation officials over a controversial plan that would have required that some state highways be put under control of the cities they are in.

Dallas city officials were among those who opposed being forced to take over roads. The Texas Municipal League announced April 7 that it and the Texas Department of Transportation agreed that such takeovers would be voluntary and not forced on any city.

"Several communities have already contacted TxDOT and volunteered operating and maintaining state roads in their areas," TxDOT spokesman Bob Kaufman said.

Dallas City Manager A.C. Gonzalez said Friday that the city has no immediate plans to take over any state roads, and he is glad a deal was worked out.

"So long as it is at the city's option, yes," he said.

TxDOT is currently working with Bexar County and the cities of Lubbock and San Antonio on turning over state roads. TxDOT's part of the agreement is to use its cost savings on transportation projects in cities that participate. The state agency will make sure any highways turned over are in satisfactory condition at the time cities take control.

TxDOT last year drew ire for proposing to turn over control of 1,900 miles of urban roads to cities and counties in what was called a "turnback" program. The general idea was that many state farm-to-market roads and highways have evolved into city streets that serve local traffic. About 100 miles of roads in Dallas were considered in the attempt to cut the state agency's costs.

TxDOT officials said those roads might be better served under city or county control. Local governments would then have final say over things such as driveway access, speed limits and maintenance schedules.

But the extra maintenance costs for those local governments would have totaled \$165 million a year statewide. Cities and the Municipal League quickly voiced opposition to the proposal because it would have forced new responsibilities and costs on local governments.

"We turned confrontation into cooperation," Municipal League president Jungus Jordan said in a prepared statement. "Now we have an agreement on how cities and the state can work together to make road improvements that will benefit drivers in cities throughout the state."

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