



• New policy signals end of road for Dallas' 'Circle D' tollway signs

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The end was quick and surgical for the iconic green "Circle D" signs that have led drivers to the Dallas North Tollway ever since the road opened in 1968.

The North Texas Tollway Authority's board of directors weighed Circle D's fate last week during discussion of a new sign policy. D's demise was almost assured by the presence of its would-be replacement, blue and white with "TOLL" in big letters, looming large in the board room.

And at 10:29 a.m. Wednesday — after little discussion and nary a mention of Circle D's 45 years of service — the board rendered a unanimous verdict: The 600 or so circular signs that dot surface streets up and down the tollway would come down later this year.

In the audience, some NTTA employees bemoaned the end of an era, even as they supported the push for larger, clearer signage on the tollway and other roads.

"It's going to be a sentimental day," said Eric Hemphill, NTTA's maintenance director. "But overall the change is for the better because it better informs everybody."

An update to NTTA's sign policy was long overdue, given all the changes that have occurred since the rules were last revised in 2008.

New toll roads — such as the Lewisville Lake Toll Bridge and extensions of the Bush Turnpike and the Sam Rayburn Tollway — have opened. And the agency switched to an all-electronic toll collection system in 2010, getting rid of toll booths in the process.

Much of the new policy focuses on better explaining to drivers, particularly those from out of town, how they can pay tolls.

New "ZipCash" signs will include the clarifier "PAY BY MAIL." Other signs will alert motorists that EZ TAGs from Harris County and TxTags from the Texas Department of Transportation will work just like NTTA's TollTags.

But the new guidelines also call for more consistency in the signs on and off the tollways that mark NTTA's roads. And sticking out in a crowd of rectangular signs has been the green dot emblazoned with a large "D" and the words "Dallas North Tollway."

The Circle D dates back to the Dallas North Tollway's earliest promotional material, even before the road officially opened in February 1968.

It appears that Witherspoon and Associates, a Fort Worth public relations and advertising firm, created the logo for what was then the Texas Turnpike Authority. NTTA officials said the design was used for on-route markers and the "trailblazer" signs that direct drivers onto the toll road from surface streets.

An agency document from October 1967 described how "more than 200 signs bearing the emblem have been placed at strategic points on major thoroughfares in Dallas to guide motorists to the Tollway."

"Signs feature white lettering on green background with red directional arrow showing best route to the Tollway," the document said. "They are coated with special reflective material for maximum visibility at night."

The green signs held fast as the tollway stretched north over the years, although NTTA at some point started using more conventional, rectangular route markers on the toll road. Some green on-route signs still exist, officials said, but most Circle D's are on streets around the tollway.

There were reports in 2009 that the green dot signs were on their way out. But NTTA officials said last week that those rumblings never reached the board level, and in any case, the switch didn't happen.

But that will all change later this year, when the Circle D's start coming down.

NTTA officials stress that the new signs will be an upgrade.

The word "tollway" on the Circle D stands only 2 inches tall. But on the new signs, the letters will stretch 6 inches high. And the word "toll" on the new signs will be

50 percent bigger than on NTTA's other "trailblazer" signs, which will be replaced in the coming years as needed.

"The ability to see you're getting on a toll road is clearer to our customers," said Hemphill, the maintenance director. "We will have a consistent shape and theme to our 'trailblazer' signs, so you'll know you're on an NTTA system."

Some of the Circle D's are a mile or two from the tollway, so tracking down every last sign will require some detective work. But NTTA officials emphasized that they don't need the public's help in making the switch.

"We have trained professionals that can remove the signs," Hemphill said.

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Tapeis GlueandBacking 2 hours ago

The problem with the sign is it reminds older drivers that the toll was supposed to be fixed and with an expiration date.

The reason the tolls are always an odd number is to that they can be raised without too many people noticing.

We pay a huge toll for the roads, registration, and a huge gas tax.

I love the toll roads, but we're already paying for them through our huge taxes to the government.

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R.S. 2 hours ago

Hopefully these aren't the same professionals that originally missed connecting the DNT to the Sam Rayburn.

Reply

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_TomJones 11 hours ago

The NTTA should be disbanded. The notion that urban drivers should have to pay to drive on roads and rural drivers do not is insane. If we need more roads, raise taxes, not tollbooths, to pay for them.

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