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## Transportation gets positive report on handling 2014 Final Four



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Regional transportation officials concluded that few significant changes are needed for the next Final Four or similar mega events, according to a North Central Texas Council of Governments report.

Many of the report's recommendations are to do essentially what they've already been doing. Among the few changes suggested was making access to taxis easier at AT&T Stadium and urging organizers to book shuttle service earlier so they don't have to use school buses.

The nine-page assessment was presented to the Regional Transportation Council at its meeting Thursday in Arlington. The men's basketball Final Four in early April was the area's largest team sporting event since the 2011 Super Bowl, also played at AT&T Stadium in Arlington.

Some proposed changes could go into effect for the inaugural College Football Championship Game to be played Jan. 12 at AT&T Stadium.

"We tried a dozen things during the NCAA Final Four that we plan on using for that particular [college football] championship game," said Michael Morris, the council of governments' transportation director. "Several of them worked very well, and one or two didn't."

Some proposed changes include moving taxi queues closer to AT&T Stadium, creating separate taxi lanes to encourage cabs to make repeat trips and making sure fan hotels have direct access to mass transit or shuttle routes.

Morgan Lyons, a DART spokesman, said he's unaware of any large changes the agency is planning based on its Final Four experience. He said there are always improvements DART can make by communicating better with riders, particularly during events that attract many out-of-towners.

"We learn a lot with each one," Lyons said. "What they have in common is that we have people using the system who are new to the system."

The region will see that again with next year's football championship and the Academy of Country Music Awards about three months later. In both cases, many fans are expected to stay in Dallas even though the event is in Arlington.

Regional transportation officials have created temporary shuttle routes between AT&T Stadium and a Trinity Railway Express station in Fort Worth to use during major events such as these. Arlington does not have mass transit other than one experimental bus route linking that same TRE station to the University of Texas at Arlington.

Local officials are also seeking the 2016 Republican National Convention, although that is proposed for American Airlines Center rather than the Dallas Cowboys' stadium.

Unlike the Super Bowl experience, there was minimal post-Final Four criticism of the region's transportation. There were some early concerns for Monday night's championship game, when fan traffic had to compete for road space with commuter traffic. But traffic on Interstate 30 and other nearby freeways was heavy but not disastrous.

Also, DART trains and other mass transit mostly ran smoothly for the college basketball fans, a welcome change from the 2011 Super Bowl. On that game week, snow and ice storms temporarily shut down the DART rail system and made travel throughout the large region difficult.

Except for a heavy downpour for part of Final Four Sunday — in between the two rounds of games — the weather mostly cooperated.

The current report did note that traffic delays and the lack of a direct mass transit link to AT&T Stadium were the most common complaints from fans on social media sites.

“Recognize that all attendees will have a different experience and perception of traffic delays going to and coming from an event,” the report said.

#### **BY THE NUMBERS: Public transit**

**3,130** — Fans who took a Trinity Railway Express train and then a shuttle to the Final Four Saturday night semifinal games.

**3,400** — Fans who took a shuttle and then a TRE train when leaving Saturday night’s games.

**2,400** — Fans who took rail to Monday night’s championship game.

**2,600** — Fans who took rail after Monday night’s championship game.

**40** — School buses used to shuttle fans between AT&T Stadium and the TRE’s CentrePort/DFW Station.

**1,800** — Taxi trips after Saturday’s games.

**900** — Taxi trips after Monday’s game.

#### **AT A GLANCE: Future needs**

Transportation recommendations for future mega events, such as the College Football Championship in 2015:

Book the shuttle buses that transport fans from the CentrePort/DFW rail station to AT&T Stadium earlier. The NCAA contractor was forced to use school buses when traditional shuttle buses were unavailable.

Move the taxi queue from the west side of Global Life Park to a spot closer to AT&T Stadium. Create a taxi lane or another way to help cabs to make multiple trips after the game. There were few repeat pick ups after the games.

Continue using the special multiday regional transit pass created for Super Bowl XLV and also available for this year’s Final Four.

Start at least six months in advance when creating a map showing lane closures, barricades and other obstacles that restrict traffic.

Prepare a new snow and ice plan in conjunction with the Texas Department of Transportation.

SOURCE: North Central Texas Council of Governments

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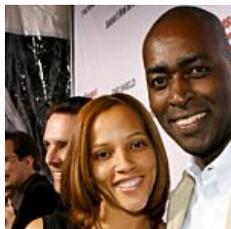
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