

# Transportation trends, challenges emerge at Dallas conferences



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By [BRANDON FORMBY](#)

Transportation Writer

[bformby@dallasnews.com](mailto:bformby@dallasnews.com)

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North Texas is a car-loving region that's also home to the nation's longest light-rail network. And in the past week, Dallas has served as the epicenter for national discussions about how transportation solutions are devised and implemented.

A cadre of professors, architects, politicians and technology executives talked about how transportation works — or doesn't — in cities during last week's New Cities Summit and the ongoing U.S. Conference of Mayors.

And even though the country predominantly moves by automobile, many of the conversations focused on public transit and biking.

"The fact that we've given our soul to the car is nothing new," Alex Krieger, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, said at the New Cities Summit. "What we need to do in this country is provide more choice."

Here's a look at some of the ideas, trends and challenges speakers addressed:

## Bike lanes

The president of People for Bikes told a room full of the nation's mayors that biking increases when cities put up a physical barrier, instead of a painted line, between car and bike lanes. A report from Tim Blumenthal's organization found that property values in some cities are higher around bike trails. It also says biking promotes better health and that retail customers who bike to stores spend more per month than drivers.

"I'm not here to tell you how cities can help bike riders and bike riding," Blumenthal said. "I'm telling you how bike riders and bike riding can help cities."

## Automated cars

Claire Hughes Johnson, the vice president for Google's self-driving car project, said automated vehicles could make driving safer. She said most accidents are caused by human error and that more than 33,000 Americans die in wrecks every year.

"That's the equivalent of a Boeing 737 going down every weekday," she said.

Johnson also told the mayors that automated cars would be safe enough to drive with much less distance between vehicles.

"We could actually use 30 percent more — at least — of our highways," she said.

## Streetcar projects

Dallas is currently building a streetcar line from Union Station downtown to Methodist Dallas Medical Center in north Oak Cliff. The city plans to expand it to the Bishop Arts District and eventually hopes to tie it into the McKinney Avenue Trolley.

Portland Mayor Charlie Hales said a streetcar line helped remake his city's Pearl District, an old rail yard turned into a high-density neighborhood. He said street cars are about place-making.

"It's not a universal tool," Hales said. Street cars need to be used to benefit land along the lines, not "just to solve a congestion problem."

### Federal funding

North Texas transportation projects routinely receive federal funds after regional officials secure some level of local funds for the work. Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti told his counterparts during a transportation and communications committee meeting about the troubles of garnering federal dollars without a local match. He said Los Angeles started getting federal assistance once residents there approved a half-cent sales tax for transit projects.

"More and more, I think this is the model," Garcetti said.

### Investments

Atlanta in the past decade has spent hundreds of millions of dollars expanding a streetcar line and turning an abandoned rail line into a park linking 45 neighborhoods. Atlanta Mayor Kasim Reed told his colleagues that the public projects have improved residents' quality of life and spurred more than \$1 billion in private investments.

"All of these projects have helped Atlanta's economy to get off its knees," he said.

### Effects on land use

A constant refrain during the New Cities Summit echoed a growing national call for transportation officials to consider land use and economic development potential when planning how to move people through cities. Experts and academicians repeatedly said more highway capacity isn't the answer and can actually hurt neighborhoods and cities.

"Mobility should not be the only variable," Krieger said.

Harold Madi, Toronto's urban design director, said ignoring how transportation infrastructure affects its surroundings has pulled urban areas apart for decades.

"It's been absolutely detrimental to cities," he said.

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