



# I-30 HOV lanes to remain open for Cowboys games and other major Arlington events



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Sports fans will get to enjoy some VIP treatment on a short stretch of Interstate 30's HOV lanes in Arlington — at least for a while longer.

Texas Department of Transportation officials announced last month that all the road's express lanes between Dallas and Arlington were closing for at least two years, as workers convert the lanes into upgraded, tolled managed lanes.

But football season and possibly playoff baseball are looming. And as AT&T Stadium hosts its first Dallas Cowboys home game on Saturday, officials have decided to keep the HOV exit ramp to Legends Way and Baird Farm Road open for select events.

That "T-ramp" receives westbound I-30 traffic before games and distributes drivers back onto eastbound I-30 after games. The exit — and the short HOV lane segment that feeds it — will open during events with an attendance of 32,000 or more.

That setup will last at least through April, when the NCAA Final Four is held at AT&T Stadium.

"We learned long ago that the fan experience really begins in the car, when they're driving in," said Dallas Cowboys spokesman Brett Daniels. "So we're very appreciative of TxDOT working through a solution to keep that open for our events."

Officials also clarified some other key components of the \$63 million project to rebuild I-30's fast lanes. That includes details on what the final product will look like starting in 2015 and who will have to pay to ride the tolled managed lanes.

Revised renderings of the lanes, known as TEXpress Lanes, show that there won't be 24-hour two-way traffic. But the project will still increase access to the managed lanes and stretch them a bit farther.

The fast lanes will be one lane in each direction from about Collins Street in Arlington to the Bush Turnpike. There will be two reversible lanes from the Bush Turnpike to Postal Way in Dallas. And there will be one reversible lane from Postal Way to around Sylvan Avenue in Dallas.

That final section, however, probably won't open until 2017. That's when construction wraps up on the horseshoe overhaul of Interstates 30 and 35E in Dallas.

The reversible sections, when complete, will initially follow the normal time schedule: eastbound from 6 a.m. to noon and westbound from 1 to 8 p.m. But officials are looking at eventually extending eastbound hours even earlier.

The TEXpress lanes will also allow single-occupant vehicles to pay a fee and get on the fast track. But even though cars with two-plus occupants have for years been able to drive the I-30 HOV lanes for free, the new version will require them to pay a fee to drive.

Two-plus vehicles will, however, receive a discounted rate.

Officials said the plan across North Texas has long been to turn HOV lanes into tolled managed lanes.

The shift was determined years ago by the Regional Transportation Council and other policymakers. It will allow planners to better pay for maintenance on those roadways and secure extra dollars for other highway projects in the region.

"We have to fund a transportation system for 6.7 million people," said Michael Morris, transportation director at the North Central Texas Council of Governments.

The I-30 managed lane project is being lumped together with other major projects in North Texas that involve TEXpress Lanes. That includes LBJ Express and the

DFW Connector.

Complicating factors is that tolling equipment will also eventually be installed on interim HOV lanes on I-35E, U.S. Highway 67 and elsewhere. Those lanes will then allow single-occupant cars to hop on for a fee and remain free for two-plus vehicles.

But those HOV lanes will also eventually become TEXpress Lanes, once their fast lanes are overhauled and improved.

Morris said he understands that some drivers will be upset about having to pay for lanes that have been free for the past several years. But he pointed blame at the Legislature and Congress for not providing the necessary transportation funds.

And he said drivers will still be able to drive in the free main lanes, benefiting perhaps from more motorists using the TEXpress Lanes.

“Or if you’re in a hurry,” he said, “get on a tolled managed lane.”

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