



# TxDOT to take control of DART's HOV lanes next month



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Dallas Area Rapid Transit will give up control next month of one of the agency's signature traffic-fighting components: high occupancy vehicle lanes.

The Texas Department of Transportation will take over on Oct. 1 the operation, maintenance and enforcement of nearly all of DART's 84 miles of HOV lanes. The reversible barriers on Interstate 30, east of downtown Dallas, will remain part of DART for another year.

The switch signals the end of an era for DART, which featured HOV lanes in its original 1983 service plan and opened its first express lanes in 1991. And it marks another step in TxDOT's gradual transition in North Texas to tolled managed lanes.

But what will it mean for commuters and others who depend on HOV lanes to bypass traffic jams?

"Not a whole lot of difference," said TxDOT spokesman Tony Hartzel.

DART has had jurisdiction over many of the region's HOV lanes — even on highways built and maintained by TxDOT — because they represent a form of mass transit. And that was critical early on in DART's existence.

Member cities were paying in a 1 percent sales tax from the get-go, knowing it would be years before DART's light-rail system got rolling. And while the agency always had a robust bus system, the HOV lanes allowed DART to combat traffic congestion in another way.

"The thought was, 'Everybody doesn't use transit,'" said Todd Plesko, DART's vice president of planning and development.

DART operates HOV lanes on East R.L. Thornton Freeway (Interstate 30); South R.L. Thornton Freeway (I-35E); Marvin D. Love Freeway (U.S. Highway 67); North Central Expressway (U.S. Highway 75); Stemmons Freeway (I-35E); LBJ Freeway (I-635); and Tom Landry Freeway (I-30).

Nearly 35 million cars traveled those HOV lanes last year, a figure that was lower than normal because of closures on the massive LBJ Express project in North Dallas. (The HOV lanes on the Landry Freeway also closed recently for construction.)

But as North Texas has continued to grow, the HOV lane picture has become more complicated.

HOV lanes have extended out of DART's service area, meaning that some funding must be arranged through the North Central Texas Council of Governments. And TxDOT is now moving in earnest toward tolled managed lanes, with the first opening later this year on the LBJ.

The TEXpress Lanes, as they're being called, will add more complexities, including the ability for single-occupant vehicles to pay a fee to ride. So both DART and TxDOT agreed that it made sense for the highway department to take control.

"It's a natural progression," Hartzel said, pointing out that TxDOT does much of the same work on those highways' other lanes.

TxDOT assumed responsibility last year of some HOV duties, such as sweeping lanes and maintaining messaging boards. But October marks the biggest transition, which will free up around \$9 million a year for DART to use on other projects.

Officials said motorists aren't likely to notice the change. Operating hours are scheduled to remain the same. Rules will be no different. DART buses will still have access to the HOV lanes. There will still be law enforcement patrolling the lanes, albeit not DART police.

DART officials are also stressing that they won't lose their investment in these HOV lanes.

The agency contributed about \$60 million, for instance, to the LBJ Express project. DART will still receive a share of any excess revenue from those tolled

managed lanes, and drivers will still benefit from the agency's focus on express lanes.

"That original vision to drive mobility for everyone will still exist," Plesko said.

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 **1DaIM** 30 minutes ago  
The only negative I can think of is that Dart had to pay for the development to begin with. But at least not DART is off the hook for future maintenance.

But that just means TxDot will burn through their tiny gas taxes faster and have even less money to subsidize more sprawl.

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 **1DaIM** 40 minutes ago  
I have to say, this is a bit unexpected. I didn't know this was coming. Sounds like a good idea to me.

I bet TxDOT drops the "HOV" part as quickly as they can and goes to all toll instead. Which is fine by me. Suburbanites should pay for their roads.

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