



Serving the counties of District 2: Fannin, Delta, Hunt, Hopkins, Rains, Rockwall, Kaufman, Van Zandt, and part of Dallas County

Let's Start I-635 East Now

Despite its urgency, the area Regional Transportation Council (RTC) continues to delay the project's forward progress and stall any thought of a non-tolled I-635 before it gets started. It is way past time to stop the debate on whether to rebuild I-635 East as a "tolled" or "non-tolled" road. The expansion of I-635 East as a non-tolled road should have and could have been started many months ago.

Regional transportation officials met last Thursday to once again discuss the LBJ East freeway project in Dallas. As has been the case for months now, most of the discussion centered around whether to include tolled managed lanes as part of the plan to upgrade 635 East between Central Expressway and I-30.

Essentially everyone agrees that this project is the most needed one in the region - if not in the entire state. Congestion on this stretch of freeway has degraded to the point where drivers routinely seek alternate routes, change travel times, and look for other modes of transportation. The congestion also has a significant negative economic impact on local businesses and the regional economy.

Every traffic and revenue study concluded that I-635 East was not "toll-viable." **That means that if it were built as a toll-road, the tolls collected would not be enough to pay for the construction loans used to rebuild the road.** And today, anyone who actually understands the process is not fooled by the attempt to perpetuate "toll roads" by rebranding them as "managed lanes."

If I-635 East was "toll viable," it would have been gobbled up by North Texas Tollway Authority (NTTA) years ago and would be in full operation by now. **NTTA would never pass up an opportunity to build or rebuild a highway that would create a positive revenue stream for their growing organization.**

Governor Abbott, Lt. Governor Patrick and the people of Texas have made it very clear that they want non-tolled roads, and they are not fooled by attempts to re-brand "toll roads" as just "managed lanes." Both (toll roads and managed lanes) charge fees, and **fees are taxes – plain and simple.**

The entire highway transportation system in Texas is unnecessarily complicated and confusing because of the myriad of organizations with overlapping, layered and convoluted authorities; all with various buckets of funding. Hopefully, this problem will be addressed in the upcoming legislative session. It certainly should be!

For weeks now, the various transportation authorities with a stake in the I-635 East expansion project have been evaluating alternative approaches to the design, construction, operation, and funding for the project. These alternatives have included no-build, no managed lanes, a variety of other "tolled lane" concepts and an "express lane" concept. It is quite clear that the intent of this alternative study is to drive the selection to one of the "tolled lane" configurations.

One good thing that has come out of this study is that a major myth has been dispelled. **MYTH: Texas must always borrow money to expand major highways; therefore, all new highways and expansions must be turned into Toll Roads.**





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Let's Start I-635 East Now *(continued)*

The recent study on I-635 E funding blows that myth out of the water. In this study, the funding sources varied little from one concept to the next, but one thing is abundantly clear – **sufficient funding is available. The funding is available without delaying any other currently approved project – and is sufficient to build any of the twelve I-635 E options; including the express lane option.** When treated with equal access to all the funding sources, the express lane option is just as viable as the other build options. If the construction cost can be reduced by \$200 million for an alternative I-30 interchange design for the toll options, then it can be also be changed for the express lane option.

There are actually only two distinct, unresolved issues between TxDOT and the Dallas Regional Transportation Council (RTC) causing the impasse to the start of the I-635 East Phase 3 project. One is strictly a policy issue, and the other is a funding issue.

1. **Policy issue:** “tolled” vs “non-tolled” lanes (RTC insists on tolling)
2. **Funding issue:** identification of funding source to complete the desired project (TxDOT wants 100% of construction cost to be “in the bank”)

This project could start tomorrow if:

- 1) The RTC would agree to the non-tolled express lane configuration – which is in compliance with Governor Abbott’s directives, and the stated wishes of the voters; and
- 2) If TxDOT would agree to accept a funding plan that does not rob money from any previously approved project and allows funding from any source or cost reduction options, like the I-30 interchange, available to the “tolled lane” options.

There is absolutely no excuse for continued delay of this vital project. The cost of delay is great in terms of lost hours due to traffic congestion, while the delay costs at least \$5 million dollars per month. All the while, the delay exposes travelers to a growing risk of serious accidents because I-635 is documented to be one of the most dangerous roads in Texas.

The delay of I-635 East is unwarranted, and it all boils down to politics and the “toll road hungry” mentality from those who desperately desire an unlimited tolling revenue stream they can use to go around the Governor, Lt. Governor and the Texas Legislature. **Texans deserve better than they are getting.**

