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300 million save time by sharing the ride

DART Marks 10 Years of High Occupancy Vehicle Lanes

DART's High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) system celebrated its 10th anniversary September 19, and after serving 300 million commuters, the agency is making plans to add more than 80 miles of timesaving lanes.

DART's first HOV, 5.2 miles of reversible HOV lane on East R.L. Thornton (I-30) Freeway from downtown Dallas east to Jim Miller Road, opened September 19, 1991. Now, DART's four HOV lane facilities total 23.5 miles. Besides I-30, there are east- and west-bound HOV lanes on LBJ Freeway between US 75 and I-35E, north- and south-bound HOV lanes on I-35E Stemmons Freeway between LBJ Freeway and Trinity Mills, and north- and south-bound HOV lanes on I-35E South R. L. Thornton and US 67 Marvin D. Love freeways south of downtown to I-20.

It takes at least two persons per vehicle to travel in the HOV lanes which are separated from main freeway lanes by either a concrete barrier or a double-white line, distinctively marked by a diamond painted on the pavement. DART's HOV system saves commuters time by helping them pass traffic jams on busy freeways, says DART's Koorosh Olyai, assistant vice president of DART's Mobility Programs Development Division.

"The lanes save time and money for HOV carpoolers and DART," he says, adding that 323 DART buses, mostly driving express routes, use the HOVs each weekday, avoiding congestion slowdowns, using less gas and fewer vehicles and saving the agency almost $800,000 a year. DART's growing fleet of vanpools, responsible for more than 350,000 trips a year, also uses the HOV lanes.

More drivers are looking past clogged roadways and see the benefits of sharing the ride. "Our ridership is growing by around five percent a year, and we predict the growth will continue as long as area freeways are congested," said Olyai.

Olyai said DART won't consider a new HOV project unless it can save motorists at least one minute for every mile driven. In other words, commuters sharing the ride in a five-mile-long HOV lane should be able to make their trip at least five minutes faster than the driver of a car in the adjacent freeway lane.

HOV lanes even benefit drivers in adjacent main freeway lanes. The Texas Transportation Institute says average speeds on the I-35E main lanes have increased from 24 to 44 mph since the opening of HOV service. On I-30, speeds are up from 22 to 30 mph on lanes adjacent to the HOV, and on the congested LBJ Freeway, the HOV lanes are credited with moving up average speeds from 34 to 43 mph.

Already, DART and the Texas Department of Transportation are making plans for an HOV lane on I-35E that would extend from I-635 in the north to Spur 408 south of I-30. DART also is going ahead with HOV plans for SH 114 from SH 183 to the Tarrant County line. Other freeways slated for additional HOV development are US 75 and LBJ Freeway (I-635).