

## Guest blogger: Road-funding imbalance leaning away from Dallas, toward Fort Worth



9:06 AM Tue, Jul 13, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Yahoo! Buzz](#)

Rodger Jones/Editorial Writer [Bio](#) | [E-mail](#) | [News tips](#)



*That's the message from long-time transportation advocate Grady Smithey, a Duncanville City Council member and secretary of the Dallas Regional Mobility Council.*

*Smithey gives voice to what many Dallas-area officials have been whispering about -- perceived favoritism toward Fort Worth in road funding, at the Dallas side's expense.*

*I think part of that has to do with the feeling of being overtolled on the east side, when others get free roads. Part has to do with questions about why the NTTA is going forward with a Tarrant County project -- the Southwest Parkway and, probably, Chisolm Trail -- that will be heavily subsidized by the east.*

*But Smithey has gotten what he considers the root of the matter by pulling funding statistics out of TxDOT for recent years. His analysis:*

There is mounting concern among elected officials in the Dallas TxDOT district about the imbalance in the amount of federal and state funding allocated to Fort Worth TxDOT district projects.

I served on the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) Regional Transportation Council (RTC) for a total of 13 years. During most of my tenure the east-west split of RTC-distributed funds was 69% east to 31% west.

At one point in that time two **Tarrant County** elected officials, a county commissioner and a mayor wanted to institutionalize those percentages. I talked them out of pursuing that notion on the basis that at some time in the future they would need to get a larger share of expenditures to build some of their large projects. Maybe I should have kept quiet.

In the period from 1993 to the present, the authorized projects for the districts went 66.7% for Dallas and 33.3% for **Fort Worth**, which might sound about right, given the population and lane miles in both districts. Wrong, wrong, wrong!

Authorized projects must be let to be constructed. Project lettings in that time period total \$2,648,077,101 for Dallas and \$2,470,612,615 for Fort Worth -- a 51.7% to 48.3% split.

To understand how in the last three years this imbalance developed, you must know that TxDOT has transferred funds from the rationally based formulas used when Ric Williamson was chair of the Texas Transportation Commission and distributed them directly from Austin under the Commission Strategic Priority funding category. Is it any surprise that the Fort Worth district received over 67%

of that money, plus 100% of the federal stimulus (ARRA) money? It should not be if we were all paying attention, but therein lies the rub.

When east RTC members have the temerity to point out the current terrific imbalance at the council's monthly meetings, they are generally upbraided by western members who harken back to the 1970s, when the east got more than its normal share.

Give it a rest, west RTC members. You've outflanked us easterners very neatly. Your influence with the governor and the Lege caused former Fort Worth city councilman and North Texas Turnpike Authority board member Bill Meadows to be appointed to the Transportation Commission, and you've received most of the gravy ever since.

Only county commissioners Joe Jaynes of Collin County and Maurine Dickey of Dallas County have had the fortitude to call into question the imbalance in funding. When doing so they received no help from the other easterners, many of whom agree behind the scenes but never seem to find the courage to speak up in the RTC meetings.

As a southern Dallas County elected official serving in my 21st year on the Duncanville City Council I could almost find this amusing -- if it wasn't so serious! To understand why I can say that, you must be aware of the gross funding imbalance that has existed in Dallas County in my years of service.

During one six-year period in the 1990s, the Dallas County area south of Interstate 30 had 34% of the county's population, 28% of its car registrations and 18.5% of its vehicle hours of congestion -- and received only 8% of highway improvement funds.

A few years earlier, in the 1980s, we recognized the inequity of the Houston TxDOT district receiving 35% of state highway funds with only 22% of car registrations. During that time the Dallas and Fort Worth TxDOT Districts, with 25% of the state's car registrations, received only 16% of state transportation funding. That inequity caused then-Dallas County Judge Lee Jackson to call a few of us together to form the Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition (DRMC). In the last 10 years, we have had great success in increasing our area's share of state transportation funding.

Given our success, a peculiar problem developed within our own membership: We couldn't seem to recognize an unbalanced split within Dallas County; almost all the money we received went to Precincts 1 and 2 on the northern side of the county, or to southern Collin County.

One year when Ann Richards was governor TxDOT had \$40 million in discretionary money unobligated near the end of the fiscal year. I traveled to Austin to try to get that \$40 million. When I made the request, the governor looked me straight in the eye and said, "Grady, You know that if I give you this money you won't see a dime of it spent south of the Trinity River." "Well", I said, "At least I'll have a chance to fight for it." She gave us the \$40 million, which was all spent in northern Dallas and southern Collin Counties.

Finally, TxDOT shows an alarming trend -- more and more funding is put into the discretionary pot and removed from formula funding. In order to receive an equitable amount of funding, elected officials in the Dallas TxDOT district must demand that our elected state officials insist that two actions be taken by TxDOT:

- First, return to the formula funding previously used instead of allocating so much transportation money from the commission's Strategic Priority Category.

- Second, do not combine the Dallas and Fort Worth TxDOT district offices. That could have catastrophic consequences to funding imbalances -- now for Dallas, but later when the tide turns, as it inevitably will, for Fort Worth as well.

Who wants to see the old time Dallas-Fort Worth fights start up again?

Meanwhile Dallas district elected officials need to help Joe and Maurine as they ask very legitimate questions about the current funding imbalance.