

TRANSPORTATION | FEDERAL FUNDING

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Not this time, North Texas

Whiff on grant program could alter, delay or cancel some road and rail work

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North Texas has missed out on a group of federal transportation grants, causing planners to re-evaluate financing and design on several local projects. The whiff in chasing the highly competitive grants — announced last

month by the U.S. Department of Transportation — isn't likely to derail any major efforts in the works, officials said. But it probably puts the kibosh on a few wish-list proposals, such as Dallas Area Rapid Transit's plans for powered track-switching improvements in its replacement of rail through downtown Dallas. And it's forcing creative financing on other projects, such as the S.M. Wright Freeway overhaul that needs an extra \$20 million to allay South Dallas residents' concerns about access to neighborhoods.

"It is what it is," said Michael Morris, transportation director at the North Central Texas Council of Governments. The Dallas-Fort Worth area has had some past success in winning federal grants from the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery program. The Dallas streetcar project to Oak Cliff was awarded \$23 million in 2009, the year the TIGER program began. The Bush Turnpike's western extension got \$20 million that year.

DART got \$5 million in 2011 for its Orange Line expansion. But North Texas has struck out in the last couple of years, leaving some projects in a lurch. Morris, who helps coordinates many of the grant applications, said he didn't doubt that the region's proposals were "analytically reviewed." But he said it was possible that politics played a role, too. Now that Congress has eschewed earmarks — long a way for lawmakers

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STATE FAIR OF TEXAS

Neck-and-neck winner



Bird Paradise with jockey Karla Burrell (left) and Tweety Bird, ridden by Jerry Davis, race to the finish in Fair Park's Pan American Arena. Along with ostrich races, a new attraction at the State Fair of Texas, the daily shows feature youngsters competing with emus and ducks.

Photos by Tom Fox/Staff Photographer

Fairgoers flocking to see newest attraction: ostrich races

By JULIETA CHIQUILLO
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Year after year, the State Fair tries to outdo itself, from Big Tex to the animal shows. Sprinting pigs won fairgoers' hearts in the 1980s and again in 2005 after a hiatus. Three years ago, the Amazing Dobermans entered the scene on a shiny motorcycle, unleashing their stunts at Pan American Arena. But this year, it's the ostrich races that fans are flocking to see. The African birds joined the lineup by chance. State Fair spokeswoman Sue Gooding was on vacation at the Kansas bed-and-breakfast owned by Joe Hedrick, the man behind the petting zoo and pig races at the fair. She saw photos of the racing ostriches at the inn and asked Hedrick about bringing them to Texas. The farmer said yes. Gooding had to persuade her bosses. "It took a while to convince people that yes, Dallas is ready for ostrich races, but we did it, and they're here," Gooding said. To make room for the big birds, the fair had to bump another act. And so the Amazing Dobermans rode off into the sunset. On one recent evening, about 15 ostriches paraded around the arena. Hedrick, the master of ceremonies, then introduced the three jockeys who would ride the birds around a short U-shaped track. "There's nothing like it in the world," said Karla Burrell of Virginia City, Nev., who also races zebras and camels. "It's like riding a football, if you can imagine that." The bird's body turns as if on a

pivot, and jockeys must hang on to the high part to keep their balance, she said. Ostriches are strapped with a riding pad that jockeys clutch during the race. Some jockeys tuck their legs under the birds' wings. And that's it. No reins. "You're really limited on control," Burrell said. Hedrick traveled to Texas with two dozen of his feathery contenders. They'll take turns racing at the fair daily. The Kansas farmer said he's worked with exotic animals for at least 40 years. Don't ask him if he has a favorite ostrich. "It's like saying, 'Which one of your children is your favorite child?' I don't think it would be fair to do

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Jonathan Wesolowski, 2, of Rowlett gets a bird's-eye view of the contenders with a lift from his dad, Joseph Wesolowski, following the ostrich races.

IMMIGRATION

Beatle's case got a little help

'Prosecutorial discretion' can stop deportations, but scope of its use is unknown

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Former Beatle John Lennon gave music many memorable songs. But he also played a role in U.S. immigration policy. In 1975, Lennon's lawyer Leon Wildes fought to keep Lennon from being deported over a conviction for possession of cannabis resin in Britain. The suit under the Freedom of Information Act brought to light a then-murky legal area of "prosecutorial discretion" also being used today for potential deportees who aren't considered a high priority. As Congress sputters on an immigration overhaul that could determine the fate of an estimated 11.7 million immigrants in the country unlawfully, the Obama administration has applied prosecutorial discretion in a series of directives. One directive issued in August focused on immigrant parents in deportation proceedings. It re-emphasized guidelines to keep families together.

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OAK CLIFF

Home has blast from the past

Owner enjoys showing atomic-age bomb shelter to friends, other visitors

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When Don Sanders visited his Kessler Park home as a prospective buyer last year, an inconspicuous slab of concrete partly covered by metal casing caught his eye. The real estate agent told Sanders it was a storm shelter. But the air vent turbines suggested to Sanders that the original homeowner had prepared for something much more destructive. Like a nuclear bomb. Under that metal cover, a steep set of stairs led to a fallout shelter furnished with three beds, a toilet and an air and water filtration system, lined with shiny lead. Sanders said he had always wanted to live in Oak Cliff and in a '50s home, but this underground slice of history sealed the deal.

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DART

Board looking at benefits

Board members will consider extending coverage to unmarried employees' significant others and will elect new officers. 4B

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DALLAS

'I know what they've been through'

At church event, families thank activist who created AIDS quilt

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When Rodney Pirkle Jr. died nearly 20 years ago in Arlington, the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt offered his parents an outlet for their grief. This weekend, Rosemary Pirkle, 82, had the opportunity to offer her thanks to

the man who started the project. The quilt panel that Pirkle's parents created was among dozens on display Sunday at the Cathedral of Hope's annual Hope for Peace and Justice event. The quilt, which pays tribute to more than 94,000 people who have died from AIDS-related causes, was started by human rights activist Cleve Jones, the featured speaker at the service. Jones said that the project has helped him forge deep connections with people

from coast to coast. "Total strangers love me, and I know what they've been through," he said. "I don't know them, but I know what they've been through." "I know what she's been through," he said of Pirkle. "I just met her yesterday, but I know her." Pirkle said she was happy to finally meet Jones years after submitting her

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Ben Torres/Special Contributor
Human rights activist Cleve Jones, creator of the AIDS Memorial Quilt, signs a program for Mario Rodriguez after Jones' speech.