

Hospital Execs: Traffic A Major North Texas Health Issue

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Drivers wait in traffic during the afternoon commute. (credit: Mario Tama/Getty Images)

NORTH TEXAS (CBSDFW.COM/KRLD) – The chief executive officers (CEOs) of two hospitals say one of the biggest health issues in North Texas is traffic congestion.

According to the executives, traffic delays are keeping people from getting to a doctor or the hospital on time, and it's only getting worse. "I understand our love affair with vehicles, but there has to be a time when we as Texans say there's a smarter way to do it," urged Robert Earley, CEO of John Peter Smith (JPS) Hospital in Fort Worth.

Earley told the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition that the growing North Texas population faces a need for better ways to get to medical help.

Early said there are additional issues with JPS being the only Level-One trauma center in Tarrant County. "Seconds count and if we have a transportation system that we're snarled and we can't get those individuals to our facility, you can have the best facility around and it won't matter."

Doug Hawthorne, CEO of Texas Health Resources, agrees and said actually *getting to* a medical facility may be the biggest challenge for North Texans. "The lack of public transportation, for both our patients and our employees, is a critical issue," he said.

Hawthorne said the problem will only become more exacerbated since the North Texas population is expected to double in the next 20 years. "That will add a great deal of burden on the healthcare system, on the education system," he said. "But it will be a huge burden on the transportation system, if we can't get people where they need to go."

Both men are calling for the expansion of public transportation and reduction of traffic congestion in an effort to improve North Texas healthcare in the future. Earley said flatly, “If we don’t deal with that issue [transportation] and we don’t deal with trying to make sure that you have access available to the healthcare, healthcare won’t matter. It’s a secondary issue.”