

## NTTA board required to disclose financial holdings, conflicts of interest under new ethics policy

By MICHAEL A. LINDENBERGER

Staff Writer

[mlindenberg@dallasnews.com](mailto:mlindenberg@dallasnews.com)

Published: 18 January 2012 10:25 AM

For the first time, [North Texas Tollway Authority](#) board members will be required to disclose financial holdings, including ownership interests and business partnerships, each year under a new ethics policy adopted unanimously Wednesday morning.

In addition, board members with actual or potential conflicts of interest related to issues on which they would vote would be required to disclose those relationships with NTTA board chairman, the executive director and the ethics officer, which is general counsel Thomas Bamonte.

The Dallas Morning News reported on Jan. 1 that ethics policy in place at NTTA are lax, and that members who have business or financial relationships with firms and individuals who are given contracts by NTTA did not disclose them to their colleagues or to the public.

The new ethics policy also tracks with recommendations made by an external audit of NTTA led by county judges in Dallas, Tarrant, Denton and Collin

counties. That report, issued in October, said the NTTA ethics policies in place needed significant improvements.

The new policy makes several important changes.

\* The new policy does not just require abstention by a board member for actual conflicts of interest. Potential conflicts, or anything that would create the impression that a director could be voting to further his own interests or those of his family, would also trigger requirements that the director not participate.

\* It will be left up to the director to flag a relationship that could possibly present a conflict of interest. Unlike the previous rules, however, the director will be encouraged to bring all potential conflicts to the executive director, board chairman and ethics officer. If the director and the NTTA leadership agree that the relationship poses no actual or potential conflict, and does not give rise to reasonable impressions of a conflict on the part of the public, then no disclosure would be made. However, if the leadership disagrees with the director then the matter could be sent to the full board for possible action.

\* The new policy requires board members who abstain from a vote to completely remove themselves from discussion of the item to be voted on. "Abstention is total. If you abstain from a issue then you abstain in all steps of the process," Bamonte told the board. "That includes not involving yourself with staff discussions. In some cases it will require board members from being absent from the room while the matters are being discussed. At other times, with a routine vote, then you would be required to perhaps just push your chair back from the discussion."

Before moving to approve the policy, Director Mike Nowells of [Lewisville](#) asked Bamonte if the policy fully incorporated suggestions from the county-level review. Bamonte said it did.