

June 2014

Chambers of Commerce, City of Plano, Answer Toyota Questions

This document includes the answers provided by representatives of the Dallas Regional Chamber, the Plano Chamber of Commerce, the city of Plano and the Plano Independent School District during the meetings with Toyota team members and associates held in late June 2014. Toyota has not verified these answers. Please [let us know](#) if you have further questions or if you have found additional information about one of the topics here that you would like to share.

For easier reading, the responses provided during the sessions were grouped into several categories. Click on the links below to jump to the topic of your interest:

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Weather & Weather Events

Q. How hot does it get there? How do you adjust?

A. Summers, while hot, are bearable and you do adjust. The average high in July is 95-96 degrees, when local residents will typically spend a lot of time in air-conditioned indoors (including community centers), particularly midday and early afternoon. You would typically plan your outdoor activities for the early and the later hours in the day. The average high for the rest of the year is about 75-76 degrees. The area does, occasionally, get some ice and snow during the winter months.

Q. How humid is Dallas relative to Houston?

A. Dallas can be dry and humid. It's somewhere between "Phoenix dry" and "Houston humid."

Q. How do you drive in the snow?

A. The area gets more ice than snow, and you can't drive on ice. Schools often close if it's dangerous at all for buses to drive. Everything tends to shut down if there's significant snow or if there is ice on the roads.

Q. How often do tornados happen?

A. The Dallas area is located in tornado alley, but that does not mean that they are happening on a regular basis. (One of the presenters mentioned two times in 15 years; another, a native of Dallas, has lived there for 50 years and has never experienced a tornado.) The weather tracking systems and local alert systems are very advanced and let residents know when to be on alert long in

advance. Normal programming will be interrupted until any danger passes. When you hear an alert, go to the safest area of house – a central area, not surrounded by skylights or windows.

Q. Do schools have safe rooms for tornados?

A. Schools usually have a safe place. Every child knows where to go.

Q. With no basements, what does the tornado preparedness entail?

A. People in the area think of tornados similarly to how Californians might think of earthquakes. Even though most of the houses do not have basements, you learn from a very early age how to prepare. All schools have plans in place and do regular drills. Kids know what to do and where to go and are taught how to shelter. In your home, you would want to move to the innermost room, which is often a bathroom. It is important to stay connected, listen to your radio and TV, so that you're prepared and ready. Unlike with earthquakes, there is typically plenty of warning for these types of severe weather events. The entire region has a very advanced warning system with sirens throughout communities. Over the past years, the Dallas region has been very lucky in that it has not had any tornados. However, the region, occasionally, gets spring storms with hail, which means you would generally want to have a garage for your car, and strong straight-line winds.

Q. Are there any tornado shelters through the city of Plano?

A. No, the city of Plano does not provide shelter facilities, but focuses on education and preparedness. However, all of the communities, including golf courses, have sirens.

Traffic, Toll Roads and Commuting

Q. Can you explain how the Dallas area toll roads work?

A. Most people can get around Plano without accessing toll roads, although you may need to use a toll road to get to downtown Dallas or to the airport. When you use them, you don't need to stop at a tollbooth anymore. You get a special tag on your car that is read by a reader and billed to your account. With the [TollTag](#) you also get a discounted rate (if you do not have it, you will receive a bill, at a higher rate, in the mail, based on your plates).

Q. Can you share more about why the toll roads were built and if they will continue?

A. The toll roads have been a way to fund infrastructure projects in the absence of a state income tax. Families can spend around \$150/month on toll ways when using them daily. It's all electronic, and the system invoices you, which makes it user friendly. The system enables the building of great freeways faster than would be possible without that funding source. However, if you live and work in Plano, you likely won't have to spend money on toll roads, because you won't need to use them.

Q. What are the typical costs for the toll roads?

A. It all depends on where you live and how you choose to commute. One of the presenters gave an example of her family, where she takes a toll road most days and her husband, who is in residential real estate, uses toll roads even multiple times a day. Their bill, and she considers them to be heavy users, is about \$150 a month. Back roads and service roads are typically a great alternative with many back roads throughout the area offering multiple lanes, etc. If you do choose to use toll roads, you can get a special [TollTag](#), which offers a discount and will automatically deduct the fee from your account; it also applies as you go to the airport.

Q. Do you have to use toll road to get to Plano from Dallas or other surrounding cities and towns?

A. Not necessarily. There are many back roads into town, as well as four- and six-lane streets and thoroughfares. You can get to Plano from most of those communities without going on the toll road and still only take about 20 minutes. If you are coming from downtown, you will take the toll road.

Q. What will the influx of new residents be on the local roads and the commute times?

A. There are a lot of construction/improvement projects happening on the roads throughout the region, many through public-private partnerships. These include an improvement project for the Dallas North Tollway.

Q. What is the price of gas?

A. Right now, regular unleaded is about \$3.59 per gallon.

Q. Is most of the commute traffic toward or away from Dallas?

A. For the most part, the commute is toward Dallas in the morning and away from the city in the afternoon.

Q. How far is the DART light rail station from the new Toyota site?

A. Currently there is no light rail line that goes directly to the future Toyota site. There is a DART light rail station in the northeastern quadrant of Plano (with two stations in the city). To reach the Toyota site, one would have to transfer to a bus, also part of the DART system.

Q. Where does the light rail run?

A. It originates in Dallas and runs as far as north as Plano. It also goes east, west and south of Dallas. It also recently opened connections to the DFW airport.

Living in Plano/DFW

Q. How many miles of marked bike lanes and paths are there in Plano?

A. There are no dedicated bike lanes on roads in Plano. The city does, however, have many trails and bike paths, as well as a very active cycling community. When you visit [The Plano Bicycle Association](#), you can find maps of the many trails and routes available, and learn about or sign up for many cycling events in the area.

Q. What is the local craft beer scene like?

A. There is a very active craft beer movement in Dallas; there are also some great local distilleries (whiskey) in the area.

Q. At what age can you get a driver's license?

A. You have to be 16 to get a driver's license in Texas.

Q. How strong are the non-smoking laws in Texas?

A. Smoking regulations may differ from community to community, and it is important to do your research. In Dallas, generally, smoking is banned in all restaurants and most bars. It is very similar in Plano. There are ordinances specifically regulating this issue, including designated smoking places

for companies (should they choose to offer them). The city of Plano is also looking to discuss a new ordinance wherein e-cigarettes would be treated the same as cigarettes.

- Q. I recently read about an influx of snakes in the area. With the many parks in the area, should I be concerned?
- A. This is not a big issue, particularly in well-established areas. As new subdivisions are developed you may encounter some local critters (e.g. bobcats), but this is generally not a big concern. It depends on where you live (what type of house, how close to nature). The city of Plano is very much engaged and its Animal Control department is very active; snakes specifically have not been an issue at all.
- Q. How bad are the local bugs, including mosquitos?
- A. It's all relative. If you are out and about in the evening or in the morning, you should probably use a repellent. The Plano Department of Health is very aggressive about addressing any issues that may significantly affect the quality of life of the residents, including mosquito breeding places, such as standing water.
- Q. Is fracking an issue in the area and if so, how is the water quality?
- A. There is not much fracking activity, if any, in Collin County. The City of Plano Engineering Department is testing the water quality frequently and has not seen any issues.
- Q. What is the impact of the lead decontamination project at the Exide Technologies plant?
- A. The plant is located in Frisco; Exide Technologies is actively working to remediate the site.
- Q. Does everyone carry a gun?
- A. The state has a concealed carry law, but you do not really talk about or see guns everywhere. There is a culture where guns are respected and understood, which includes handling guns with extreme care. There is also a lot of hunting and people use guns for sporting.
- Q. We've heard all the good things about the area, but where do you see opportunities for improvement in the area?
- A. With a high rate of growth, transportation tends to be a challenge, but there has been a focus on it to meet the demands of new residents/business moving to the area. For example, 121 Tollway (Sam Rayburn Tollway) near the Toyota campus was under construction for years, but has been good for the area since completed. More bike lanes and urban residential options would be welcome. The city of Dallas has a challenge with income inequality issues.
- Q. Are there water problems in the area?
- A. Yes. Like in other parts of the Southwest, there have been concerns because of drought. There are restrictions on lawn watering in Plano and other nearby communities, and residents are being asked to reduce their water use. The cities are working with water districts to ensure continuous water supply from surrounding lakes.
- Q. Are there any activities your feel best represent Dallas that we could try to participate in during our site visit?
- A. There are a lot of possibilities:
- On the SW edge of Dallas, check out [Trinity Groves](#) – a restaurant incubator program. You can try great food, and it is a hip, fun place to be.

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- A [Frisco Rough Riders](#) game is a fun outing for family. (The Rough Riders are the AA affiliate of the Texas Rangers.)
- Try Texas BBQ
- Take a tour of downtown Dallas, including City Hall, the farmers market and historic sites.
- In Plano, check out the area around the new Toyota campus. Take time to see what the average citizen does. When you go to the shops at the Shops at Legacy you'll notice some sculptures that pay tribute to the Shawnee Trail that went through Plano. The trail could be seen for years from satellites.
- Check out [Topgolf](#), a golf entertainment complex. There's one in Allen, The Colony and Dallas. It's a fun place for families and adults.
- Eat at local restaurants. Go to a grocery store – it's a great place to people watch and check out food prices. In and Out Burger.
- Take a tour of [AT&T Stadium](#).

Education & Special Needs

Q. Is Texas going to adopt the Common Core Curriculum?

A. There are no plans to adopt it in the foreseeable future. The Texas Education Agency sets expectations for kids to prepare for future life, including standardized testing. For more information visit the [Texas Education Agency](#).

Q. Since Texas is not part of the Common Core State Standards system, what kind of special programs do you offer to best onboard kids from other states?

A. The schools in the [Plano Independent School District](#) provide a range of special programs and services for new students, including tutoring and one-on-one sessions, usually delivered on your child's school campus.

Q. How do you measure and compare the performance of schools in Texas?

A. You can learn about the performance metrics by visiting the [Texas Education Agency](#) (look for Educational Statistics). One thing to remember when comparing performance is that the Plano Independent School District has a different system for high school education, where students in grades 9 and 10 (high school) are on a different campus from those in grades 11 and 12 (senior high school).

Q. When you talk about the high quality of local schools, what is it based on?

A. We take into account many variables, including state testing, how students do on SATs and other college entry tests, etc. One thing to remember is that Plano has a system where high school students (grades 9-10) are separate from senior high students (11-12).

Q. Are there plans to build more schools in Plano?

A. As of now Plano has 72 school campuses, and the school district has more land that can be built out, if needed. The average student-teacher ratio is 20:1. One of the many ways the [Plano Independent School District](#) creates new opportunities is through the [Academies of Choice](#) with program-specific schools, including Plano Academy High School, Health Sciences Academy, and the IB World School. The nearby city of Frisco has also just approved a large bond issue to add schools to that specific fast-growing community. All communities are planning for schools long into the future.

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Q. Is the average student/teacher ratio of 20:1 in Plano a requirement and how does it differ across the area?

A. Over the past years, Plano has gone through a phase of exceptional growth, including schools. Today the city has 72 schools and the average student/teacher ratio of 20:1. The Plano Independent School District ([PISD](#)) made a commitment to this student-teacher ratio, because they believe it helps to best support local kids and to keep the dollars in the Plano schools. The ratio does, however, vary from district to district with some of the faster-growing communities in the area having ratios that are somewhat higher.

Q. Why split the high school grades in Plano?

A. Specifically for Plano, where there are a lot of kids, there are separate campuses for high and senior high students, grades 9 and 10, and 11 and 12, respectively. The Plano Independent School District felt this was the best option for delivering quality services to the kids living in the community. If your kids are into athletics, they can still take advantage of the many additional opportunities through Plano's school feeder system.

Q. With respect to high school vs. senior high. If you are a freshman or sophomore and you excel in sports, can you play at the varsity level even though you are not at the senior high school?

A. Yes, freshmen and sophomores can play up.

Q. If your child in high schools is in need of more advanced classes, can he or she take classes at the senior high school level?

A. Yes, depending on the curriculum, and transportation is provided.

Q. Do all students get to be tested to get into Plano's gifted-student program?

A. Students participate in PACE (Plano Academic and Creative Education) based upon the results of standardized tests and observation in the classroom by the teachers. Parents and teachers can also make referrals for PACE.

Q. If a child is already in a gifted-student program in our current state, do they get automatically transferred to the equivalent program in Texas?

A. Regardless of the program your child may be in currently, it is best to have a conversation with the local school in your area. They very much want to have a collaborative relationship with all the student families.

Q. Does Plano offer student permits for students who reside outside of the city?

A. No. In order to attend a school in the Plano Independent School District, you must live inside the district.

Q. What kind of afterschool care is available?

A. Plano After School Care Program (PASAR) provides before and afterschool care in the city of Plano, which generally happens at each school campus. You can find more information at the [Plano Independent School District](#) website. Typically the program provides many activities and tutoring; [PASAR](#) also provides summer programming.

Q. Are there any language immersion programs in the area?

- A. There are several immersion and other language programs in the area, including the Japanese School of Dallas at Ted Polk Middle School in Carrollton, which holds classes over the weekends.
- Q. If my child has an IEP, do we need to be reassessed in Plano, or will you accept California assessments?
- A. Take your documentation to the campus and talk to counselors there. All the Plano public schools support children with special needs and believe strongly in collaborating with parents and their kids.
- Q. What types of resources are available for special needs children?
- A. In Plano children remain in their local school, instead in a central location. They are taught techniques to be successful in school. There is afterschool care for all children, including those with special needs. Go to the websites for the various school districts to find specific information. If you have a child with special needs, take your documentation to the campus of the school he or she will be attending. In Plano, specifically, for school-age kids, there is extended support through the age of 22.
- Q. What kind of support services in the home are provided for special needs kids in the area?
- A. [Collin Cares](#) has information about various programs in the area. In Plano, My Possibilities is an organization that helps special needs adults learn life skills, focusing on young adults who have aged out of support provided through the school system.
- Q. How can we qualify for in-state tuition for Texas colleges and universities?
- A. Texas extends the in-state tuition rate to Toyota's team members and associates, and their immediate family members, immediately upon relocation.

Homes & Housing

- Q. With so much growth in many local communities, what are these local governments doing in terms of long-term planning?
- A. The city of Plano has a comprehensive plan which was developed with active involvement of the Planning and Zoning Commission, as well as local residents; it should be approved by spring 2015. Many of the fastest-growing communities, particularly in the northern parts of the DFW Metroplex area, use the resources available through the [North Central Texas Council of Governments](#) (NCTCOG) which helps local governments plan for common needs. That work also includes planning on the part of the Independent School Districts in the area, such as the recently approved bond issue for the Frisco Independent School District.
- Q. How much of an impact will the new housing inventory have on the resell value in the area?
- A. There are many homes being both offered and purchased. When it comes to new homes, realtors cannot use these for comps, so there is not much impact from that perspective.
- Q. How will be property prices affected by the influx of Toyota employees?
- A. Plano is a top relocation area with lots of people coming and going. Values don't increase when sellers hear of a new company coming into the market; there are so many relocations that property values are not affected. It's a stable environment with steady appreciation. The area does not typically experience big increases or declines; they average 3-4% annually, with the larger increase

last year only because of the prior downturn. There are multiple new construction and development projects throughout the area, particularly around Frisco and the northern communities, and the Toyota announcement has brought those to full speed.

Q. I used the Zillow application to look at housing options and pricing; are there other websites you can recommend?

A. There are other sites to use that you can find on the web. Just as an FYI when buying a house, Texas is the only state that gives you a 10-day opt-out period, during which you may "walk away" from a house purchase. So sometimes a website may say a house is for sale when it is actually sold, but it can't be noted that way because they are in the 10-day opt-out period.

Q. Should I buy a newly constructed house or existing? I'm concerned about foundation issues. What percentage of buyers actually find foundation issues?

A. For new construction, you're probably going to pay more per square foot. One issue with older homes is that if they have been vacant for a while, the foundation could be at risk. There were a lot of foreclosures during the downturn; some houses sat empty for six months or more with no one watering the foundation, which can lead to cracking of the foundation. If you are buying a pre-existing home, your realtor can put you in touch with a good home inspection firm who will look for foundation and any other issues.

Q. We've heard that the foundations on newer homes are cracking?

A. Lots of houses sit on clay, which can shift, if it dries up, so you need to water your foundation: soaker hoses around the house protect the foundation. Landscapers are aware of the issue, so houses typically have drip systems and soaker hoses to prevent the soil from moving away from the foundation. You can have the foundation inspected on any home you are considering, and home inspections are a standard part of the home purchase process.

Q. What percent of homes in the Plano area use solar energy?

A. There are some pilot programs going on in the DFW Metroplex. It is not widespread yet, but is catching on. There is general concern about damage to the panels from hail, which is why you will not see many roof-mounted solar panels; instead, people may have smaller panels used for specific needs that can be easily covered.

Q. Housing prices seem reasonable, but why are lease prices so high in comparison?

A. Leases are about 10% of what property would be for sale on the market. They can be high because there are not a lot of lease properties. The occupancy rate on apartments is 99% right now, and it is hard to find anything for less than \$800 or \$900 per month for a one bedroom.

Q. Are homes built in the last five years appreciating?

A. Before 2013, houses weren't appreciating; now they are typically selling for what owner paid or more.

Q. Specifically for temporary housing, how easy is it to find an apartment that accepts pets?

A. Typically, you can find apartments that accept pets pretty easily; they will want to know how much your pet weighs, which may determine the amount of the deposit you will need to pay.

Q. What are Home Owner Association (HOA) fees like, generally?

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- A. These vary greatly, depending on the amount of services provided and the specific neighborhood. They can be as little as \$100 a year, or quite a bit more (multiples of that, annually), if you have additional services and amenities in your community. Always be sure to check for the HOA info when looking at specific housing listings.
- Q. Why are there typically no basements?
- A. From the geological point of view, the local soil is predominantly clay with high water tables.
- Q. What would be the average monthly bill for central air conditioning?
- A. A 2,000-sf house averages \$125-\$150 per month in the summer, although older homes of that size (built in the 1960s) would be \$150 - \$175 per month in the hottest months. Lots of green homes are being built to reduce costs. Texas is a de-regulated utility market, where you can select your power provider. Check out www.PowertoChoose.org to learn more.
- Q. How much does housing insurance run generally?
- A. Call your agent or find something comparable online and give your agent the zip code. It's not really possible to give a number given the wide variety of housing available.

Family

- Q. What do kids do in the summer? Do they play outside in the heat?
- A. There are many camps offered by various organizations in July and August. There are indoor volleyball and soccer programs, as well as community pools; lots of activities available. PASAR also provides a [summer program](#). Kids tend to play outside, they just move more slowly and drink a lot of water.
- Q. What kind of summer and winter camps are offered in Plano?
- A. Plano's [Parks and Recreation](#) department has amazing summer activities for kids. Plano [libraries](#) also have great programs. The DFW Metroplex has many private camps and activities.
- Q. Does Texas offer state disability or baby bonding time?
- A. They follow the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which allows for 12 weeks a year for parents to be with their children.
- Q. Do you have MediCal equivalent for elderly?
- A. Texas has Medicare for age 65 or older and disabled.
- Q. Are there communities specifically for the 55-and-older population?
- A. There are communities, many within a half-hour commute to the future Toyota site, that are specifically designed for seniors or singles. There are also some retirement communities in the area.
- Q. What are the options for seniors in Plano, including nursing homes, etc.?
- A. There is a large senior population in the area and many options for senior living, including assisted-living facilities. The city of Plano offers a senior activity center with many programs for this specific population. Visit the city of Plano [site](#), and go to the [Senior Center](#) link under Living in Plano, where you will find updated lists for senior housing and many other resources.

Q. How about spouse employment?

A. Plano is working with local companies to consider resumes of incoming spouses. They were very encouraged by the interest shown so far by the local business community.

Q. My wife is a teacher. What are the employment opportunities within the Plano ISD and beyond?

A. The cities in this area are generally growing and they are building new schools, including the cities of Frisco and McKinney. If you want to be an educator in Texas, you do need to get certified. For more information, visit the [Texas Education Agency](#).

Q. If I work at a school out of my child's school district, can my child go to that school?

A. That is one of the only instances in which a child can attend an out-of-district school.

Taxes

Q. What is the effective residential property tax in the city of Plano?

A. Plano residents pay the lowest effective residential property tax in relation to other cities in the area. As of now The city property tax rate is \$0.4886 per \$100 of taxable value. You can learn more about local property tax rates, including the applicable Collin County and PISD tax rates, by visiting the city's [web site](#).

Q. Does Plano or Texas have a homestead exemption for property taxes?

A. You can get a [homestead exemption](#) of up to 20% (the city of Plano) or \$15,000 (Plano ISD). To qualify for this exemption, homeowners have to live in the home on January 1 of the tax year. Properties are appraised annually. For more information, and some valuable resources, please visit the [Collin Central Appraisal District](#).

Q. Are there any tax exemptions for property owners 65 and over in Plano?

A. Plano homeowners who are 65 and older receive an additional reduction of \$40,000 off their property value for the purpose of calculating their property tax ([over 65 exemption](#)). That's in addition to the homestead exemption. Note that to qualify for the homestead exemption, homeowners have to live in the home on January 1 of the tax year.

Q. Are there any additional community-specific taxes to fund utility costs?

A. Some communities in Texas have Municipal Utility District, or MUDs, to provide water and sewage to residents of a particular area. Collin County, where Plano is located, does not have MUDs at this point. This information would be included in the property listing.

Q. What is the sales tax in Plano?

A. As of now the sales tax is 8.25 percent.