pg_hint_plan

get the right plan without surprises

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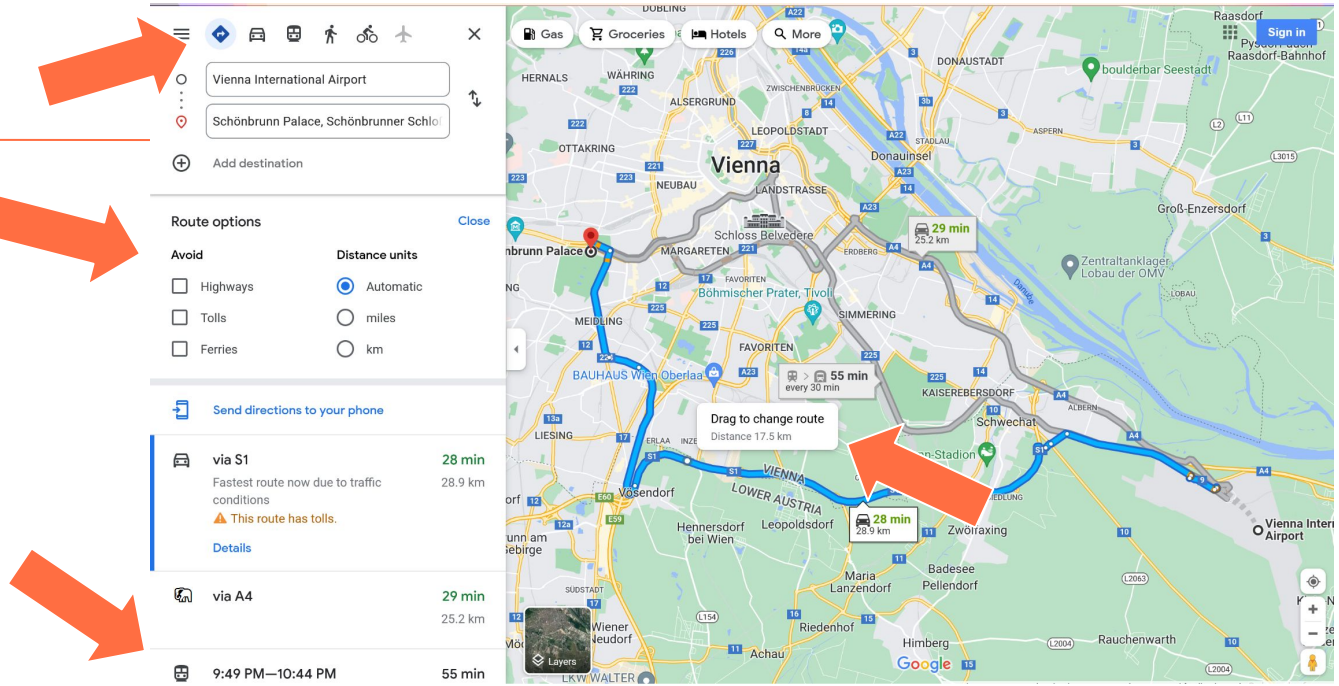
Hints... why?



Would it make sense to provide Google Maps without the choice of travel mode, route options, drag to change route?

Hints... why in SQL?

SQL is a declarative language

the query planner generates the procedural code to access data

👉 You may want to understand its choices

👉 You may want to workaround bad choices

👉 You may know your data better, want stable plans...

Hints... how in PostgreSQL?

A harmless extension that has never been accepted in PG

Install pg_hint_plan (🙏 NTT OSS)

```
FROM docker.io/postgres:14
ADD
https://github.com/ossc-db/pg_hint_plan/releases/download/
/REL14_1_4_0/pg_hint_plan14-1.4-1.el8.x86_64.rpm
RUN  apt-get update -y ; apt-get install -y alien ; alien
./pg_hint_plan*.rpm ; dpkg -i pg-hint-plan*.deb
```

Hints as directives in SQL comments

Because SQL is declarative, hints are not SQL -> comments

```
/*+
Leading ( (...) ) NestLoop(...) IndexScan(...)
Set(...) Rows(...) Parallel(...)
*/
select ... ; insert... ; prepare... ; explain ...
```

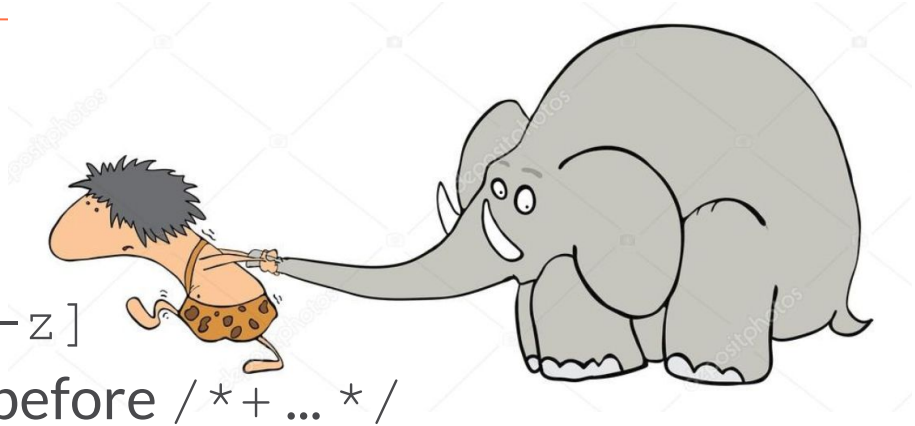
Easy, if you understand that you rarely need a single hint

Where to put /*+ ... */

At the beginning of a command

`[0-9 \t\n,_()A-Za-z]`

are the only characters allowed before `/*+ ... */`



- Syntax errors stop parsing, no nested comment, no `--`
- In the PREPARE, not the EXECUTE
- ⚠️ with multi-statement commands `;` `;` `;` `\;` `\;` `\;`

Hints reference tables and subqueries by their aliases

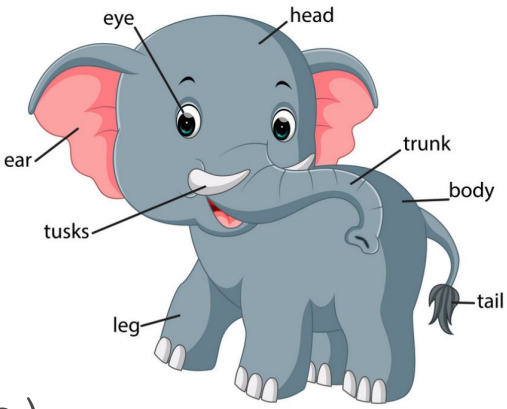
Many hints have a reference to tables

- by their alias (visible in execution plan)
- case sensitive (even with no quotes)
- Lists are not ordered:

  `HashJoin(a b c) = HashJoin(c a b)`

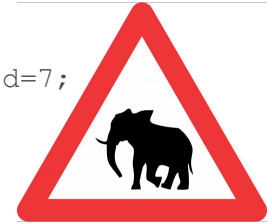
- Nested Pairs are ordered:

  `Leading( (a(b c)) ) != Leading( ((a b)c)) )`



Hints reference indexes by their name (be careful if you rename them!)

A bad name ignore all indexes



```
postgres=# /*+ IndexScan (accounts accounts_email) */ explain select * where user_id=7;
                                    QUERY PLAN
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 Seq Scan on accounts  (cost=10000000000.00..10000000011.25 rows=1 width=520)

postgres=# /*+ IndexScan (accounts) */ explain select * from accounts where user_id=7;
                                     QUERY PLAN
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 Index Scan using accounts_email_idx on accounts  (cost=0.14..8.16 rows=1 width=520)

postgres=# /*+ */ explain select * from accounts where user_id=7;
                                        QUERY PLAN
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------
 Index Only Scan using accounts_email_idx on accounts  (cost=0.14..8.16 rows=1 width=520)
```

Troubleshooting: errors and log

By default:

```
INFO:  pg_hint_plan: hint syntax error
```

More info in the log (`on` or `verbose`):

```
set pg_hint_plan.debug_print=verbose;
```

To the client (`pg_hint_plan.message_level` defaults to log):

```
set client_min_messages = log;
```

What does a hint

Hints do not force anything

It can sets high cost for the unwanted access paths

Is evaluated during the query planning process

https://github.com/postgres/postgres/blob/master/src/backend/optimizer/path/costsize.c

```
Cost        disable_cost = 1.0e10;
```

Demo:

Join order

Join direction

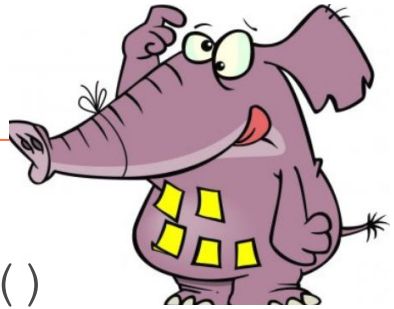
Scan method

Setting parameters

Cardinality correction

an hint on hinting

For *n* table aliases



- *n*-1 nested pair of `(outer inner)` in `Leading()`
- for each pair: `NestLoop()`, `HashJoin()` or `MergeJoin()`
  they will have from 2 to *n* aliases (order doesn't matter)
- *n* scan method SeqScan(), IndexScan(), IndexOnlyScan()
  IndexScanRegexp(), ...
  https://github.com/ossc-db/pg_hint_plan#hints-list

count 6*n-2 closing (or opening) parentheses

Join selectivity estimation

You know you data better than PG

You can fix the cardinality

```
Rows( a b #42 )
```

or, better, apply a factor

```
Rows( a b c *0.3 )
```

Set parameters at query level

Example:

Follow the order of JOIN clauses:

```
/*+
 Set(join_collapse_limit 1)
*/
```

no risk to forget to reset it back after

⚠️ for planning only, not execution

What if you cannot change the query?

```
create extension pg_hint_plan;

insert into hint_plan.hints
 (norm_query_string, application_name, hints) values (
 $sql$select * from table where a= $1 and b=?$sql$,
 'my_app', 'Leading( (a b) )'
);

set pg_hint_plan.enable_hint_table=on;
```

Applies hints to your application query

by matching the command text

- `$1`,`$2` are for prepared statements parameters
- `?` is for literals replaced before matching a query
- No final `;` except if there's one in your command

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Past:

20+ years in databases, dev and ops, consulting

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The pg_hint_plan repo:
https://github.com/ossc-db/pg_hint_plan
My blog post series on pg_hint_plan:
https://dev.to/franckpachot/series/18404

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