

Carona says gas tax won't be raised in '11, says he'll vote for Perry



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The NTTA unveiled a new monument at the entrance to its board room this morning, honoring five public officials it says have been essential to its success since its formation in 1997.

Those honored were Sen. **John Carona**, University of North Texas system chancellor Lee Jackson, former Texas Transportation Commission chairman **David Laney** and NTTA's first board chairman Jere Thompson. Sen. **Florence Shapiro** also received the inaugural Drive to Excellence Award, though she was not present today.

In accepting his award, Carona vowed to keep fighting for increased state support for transportation, despite the recent announcement that he will no longer serve as chairman of the senate transportation committee. "Mobility doesn't come free," he said.

In an interview afterward, Carona said the new chairman, Sen. **Tommy Williams**, will be a "forceful advocate for transportation." He said, however, that efforts to raise gas taxes or support a local option bill -- two initiatives Carona has championed as essential -- are doomed, given the lack of support from Gov. **Rick Perry** and House Speaker Joe Straus.

Nevertheless, Carona, a **Republican** who has frequently criticized his party, said he will vote for Perry in November over **Democrat Bill White**. "The governor and I have disagreed on transportation issues, but he has been a good governor."

In accepting his award, Jackson recalled that when he helped form the NTTA as Dallas County judge, many in the community opposed it. "This agency didn't have to exist. At the time the only toll roads we had were three segments of the DNT and the Mountain Creek Lake Bridge, and there were many who wanted to pay off the notes and go out of business."

Instead, Jackson led a push to convince lawmakers to create the NTTA out of what had been the Texas Turnpike Authority.

That legislation would never have happened had the Texas Turnpike Authority statewide board not agreed, and Thompson, who was chairman of the statewide agency, recalled that the vote to support the formation of the NTTA came down to a single vote by a Democrat from Brownsville, who broke a tie.