

Dallas Morning News

Editorial: Stay strong on transportation

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North Texas leaders should not back off their aggressive stance of pushing the Legislature for transportation money.

North Texas' transportation agenda

Under discussion by the Regional Transportation Council:

- A 10-cent-a-gallon increase in the motor fuels tax
- Indexing of the fuel tax so it rises with inflation
- County-by-county elections on transportation fees or taxes
- Allowing new fuel taxes to be used for rail transit as well as roads
- Phasing out diversions of transportation-related revenues to general state expenses
- Reauthorizing TxDOT to enter into public-private partnerships for road projects
- Building in tougher protections for the state in future public-private partnerships, such as stronger buy-back provisions for roads leased out for tolling purposes
- Giving agencies like the NTTA first call on new toll roads and TxDOT first call on toll lanes for otherwise free roads

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The subject comes up today in a meeting of the Regional Transportation Council, which is firming up a list of taxes and other revenue ideas officials want for road and rail projects.

The fight for dollars will be rougher than ever in next year's legislative session, since lawmakers will be dealing with a potential \$18 billion budget shortfall. They already are dreading the tough decisions about what spending areas to cut – or gut.

But letting up on the transportation fight would send the wrong signal – that traffic congestion has somehow reached the "acceptable" range and that we've learned to live with it.

Wrong. The job of moving people in North Texas is getting harder. Waves of new residents arrive daily, and the population spigot isn't shutting off.

If this newspaper could enlist [Ross Perot Sr.](#) to press the case for North Texas transportation, we'd hand him a pile of charts with facts like these:

The Dallas-[Fort Worth](#) area added more people last year – almost 147,000 – than any other metro area in the nation. That's like adding another [Mesquite](#), or two Flower Mounds, or three DeSotos in one year.

Fort Worth added 300 people a week, Dallas 200, [Frisco](#) 100. Once-tiny [Rockwall](#) added 57 people a week last year, growing 9 percent.

Yet money to build new highways for these people is not coming from Austin.

Which new roads and expansions won't get built or planned in the near future without more money? For starters:

- Project Pegasus, which will solve the impossible tangle of seven highway spokes that converge on downtown Dallas.
- I-35E, from LBJ Freeway to Denton.
- The S.M. Wright Freeway in [South Dallas](#).
- The Southern Gateway Project, involving I-35E in southern Dallas and U.S. 67 from Dallas into the south suburbs.
- Loop 12 in western Dallas County.
- The Loop 9 regional outer belt.

Plus, several rail transit projects in North Texas may hinge on new dollars from Austin.

A proposed 10-cent-a-gallon increase in the motor fuels tax is the headliner on the RTC's agenda. Similar proposals were snuffed and buried in recent lawmaking sessions, as were proposals for county-by-county elections on new taxes and fees.

Political handicappers give new taxes little chance of passing in next year's session. But that assessment shouldn't deter North Texans from preparing the strongest case possible that warns against the cost of inaction. Lawmakers must understand the stakes involved and think creatively about how to pay the very real – but unmet – cost of growth.

The Legislature counts on this vibrant region to fuel the state's economy and generate revenue for 25 million Texans. North Texas is a career and business destination, and it would be a crime if short-sightedness in Austin put that at risk.