

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM

EDITORIALS

Carona's job switch is loss for Texas transportation

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Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst dealt the Dallas-Fort Worth area a severe blow this past week when he replaced state Sen. John Carona of Dallas as head of the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee.

Dewhurst and Carona both have played up his new assignment as chairman of the Business and Commerce Committee and the things he can do there.

Don't be distracted. In his former job, Carona was the rock on which Dallas-Fort Worth leaders built their efforts during the past three legislative sessions to focus attention on the state's transportation problems and find ways to shore up funding for transportation solutions. It's not a good thing that he will be devoting his attention elsewhere.

Worse still is his straightforward answer as to the question of why he's making the change. Carona told Rodger Jones, editorial writer for *The Dallas Morning News*, it's because he believes there will be "no serious effort" to address transportation problems in the legislative session that begins in January. The editorial boards of the *Morning News* and the *Star-Telegram* have worked cooperatively since 2003 to bring attention to transportation needs statewide and in the Metroplex. Jones described his conversation with Carona on his newspaper's transportation blog.

Carona's chairmanship change could make the "no serious effort" comment a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Transportation Committee chairmanship will pass to the Houston area, to Sen. Tommy Williams of The Woodlands. Houston leaders have been attentive to transportation needs in recent sessions, but no area of the state has pushed so hard to meet those needs as has Dallas-Fort Worth under Carona's leadership.

The needs are great, and they will not get better without serious effort from the Legislature.

Funding is the biggest need. The [Texas](#) Department of Transportation told lawmakers during the 2009 session that by 2012 the state would run out of money for new mobility projects and would have to focus on maintaining existing roads and bridges. The only thing that's changed in that picture since then is that the [Texas](#) Transportation Commission has decided to de-emphasize maintenance in favor of squeezing out a few more dollars for new projects.

That's a formula for a steadily weakening infrastructure.

Commission Chairwoman Dierdre Delisi told a joint meeting of the House and Senate transportation committees in February that during the past 25 years Texas' population increased 53 percent and road usage more than doubled. In the same period, road capacity increased just 10.6 percent.

The state's per-gallon gasoline tax has not been raised since 1991. As vehicles become more fuel-efficient, that per-gallon tax becomes less efficient at recapturing the cost of road usage. Motor fuel tax revenue actually declined from 2008 to 2009, and the trend continued into early 2010.

The Legislature continues to divert motor fuel tax revenue away from highways to other state programs and services. "At least since 2002," Delisi said, "the amount of state motor fuel tax revenue deposited to the State Highway Fund was less than what was spent to maintain the more than 191,000 lane-miles on the State Highway System."

The solution to Texas transportation problems involves more than new roads. Particularly in urban areas like Dallas-Fort Worth, there must be more new transit options, including an expanded regional passenger rail network.

The solution starts with legislators who can see the problem and think creatively about how to fix it. That effort must not be dropped from the 2011 legislative session.

Read more: <http://www.star-telegram.com/2010/07/18/2343337/caronas-job-switch-is-loss-for.html#ixzz0u9oN3600>