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By Harold D. Hunt

HIGHWAYS AND BUY-WAYS

Texans to Vote on Funding

A superior highway system is critical to economic development. Good roadways attract and retain world-class companies while declining highway infrastructure, especially along the interstate highway system, stifles growth.

These realities loom large for Texas, which has not been able to generate sufficient funds to build and maintain the roadways needed to support the state's sharply increasing population. A constitutional amendment on the November ballot will address the challenge of increasing highway funding.

By some estimates, Texas' population will grow 60 percent faster than the nation's in the next 25 years. During that time, vehicular traffic is expected to increase 40 to 60 percent. Texas' transportation spending, by contrast, has decreased 34 percent since 1980. The

state now receives about 87 cents out of every \$1 of federal fuel tax sent from Texas to Washington.

In the last eight years, truck traffic alone has increased by more than 40 percent on the state's highways. Eighty percent of trucks crossing the U.S.-Mexico border with NAFTA-related goods cross in Texas.

The Texas Department of Transportation's (TxDOT) annual budget for highway construction is nearly \$3 billion, which limits new construction to about 36 percent of identified, needed projects. Of this, more than \$700 million

is earmarked for interstate highway expansion through fiscal year 2004. While the amount may sound significant, \$700 million only builds about 86 miles (see Tables 1 and 2), according to TxDOT's 2001 Unified Transportation Plan (UTP) (www.dot.state.tx.us/revexp/utp/utp.htm). This represents roughly 2.7 percent of Texas' 3,200-mile interstate highway system.

TxDOT officials forecast that based on current funding levels it will take more than 65 years for the 3,900 miles of two-lane roads in the 10,500-mile Texas highway trunk system to be up-

Table 1. Funding for Widening Texas' Interstate Highways

Categories 1 and 3A - High Priority Corridor and National Highway System Interstate Highway Expansions*

TxDOT District	FY2001	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	Total	Total Miles Expanded**
Abilene	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Amarillo	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Atlanta	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Austin	\$15,500,000	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$15,500,000	2.4
Beaumont	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$14,800,000	\$14,800,000	5.4
Brownwood	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Bryan	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Childress	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Corpus Christi	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Dallas	\$52,299,990	\$0	\$0	\$58,025,000	\$110,324,990	4.0
El Paso	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Fort Worth	\$9,995,800	\$0	\$27,012,000	\$48,300,000	\$85,307,800	16.5
Houston	\$0	\$33,000,000	\$89,718,601	\$20,709,000	\$143,427,601	13.0
Laredo	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Lubbock	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Lufkin	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Odessa	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Paris	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$4,000,000	\$4,000,000	0.7
Pharr	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
San Angelo	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
San Antonio	\$32,050,299	\$236,255,300	\$0	\$0	\$268,305,599	25.0
Tyler	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Waco	\$0	\$8,500,000	\$42,700,000	\$26,000,000	\$77,200,000	19.9
Wichita Falls	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Yoakum	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	0
Totals	\$109,846,089	\$277,755,300	\$159,430,601	\$171,834,000	\$718,865,990	86.9

* Priority 1 projects only, as detailed in the 2001 Texas Unified Transportation Program

** Miles refers to "highway" miles (length of highway) rather than "lane" miles (the combined length of all lanes).

Source: Texas Department of Transportation

graded to four-lane, divided highway. The Texas trunk system was created in 1988 to improve rural highway mobility by identifying and upgrading the state's important secondary highway corridors.

Funding Solutions

Two pieces of legislation were passed during the 2001 session of the state legislature in an attempt to provide more funding for highways in Texas. These bills will be on the November ballot as a proposed constitutional amendment, Proposition 15.

Senate Bill Four creates the Texas Mobility Fund, a supplementary account for transportation construction and improvements. Money deposited in the account would be used as leverage to issue bonds, dramatically increasing the impact of dollars put in the fund. According to State Sen. Florence Shapiro, sponsor of both bills, for every \$100 million deposited in the fund, about \$1 billion in bonding authority is created. If voters approve Proposition 15, the Texas legislature will have to decide how much money to deposit in the Mobility Fund and where that money will come from.

Senate Bill 342, known as the Toll Equity Bill, would allow TxDOT to contribute tax money to toll road projects without requiring repayment, thus allowing roads to be built with a mixture

of state tax money and toll proceeds. The measure will allow more projects to be built with less tax money, accelerating the overall level of highway construction.

The legislation abolishes the Texas Turnpike Authority and allows the Texas Transportation Commission to establish regional toll authorities. Regional authorities would allow local leaders and transportation planners to have more control over the development of local toll projects. Regional toll collections

would then be used to expand the toll road that produced the funds, pay for other road projects within the region or add to the Texas Mobility Fund to be bonded and spent on other major state transportation projects.

Whatever happens, the road to adequate highway funding in Texas looks to be long and winding. ♣

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Table 2. Miles of Funded Interstate Highway Widening in Texas

Categories 1 and 3A - High Priority Corridor and NHS Interstate Highway Expansions*

Interstate	FY2001	FY2002	FY2003	FY2004	Total Miles Expanded**
IH-35	2.4	11.3	14.1	3.6	31.4
IH-30	1.0	0	13.2	0.7	14.9
IH-10	0	7.9	0	5.4	13.3
IH-410	2.9	7.8	0	0	10.7
IH-45	0	0	6.3	4.0	10.3
IH-635	2.0	0	0	2.0	4.0
IH-820	0	0	0	2.3	2.3
Totals	8.3	27.0	33.6	18.0	86.9

* Priority 1 projects only, as detailed in the 2001 Texas Unified Transportation Program

** Miles refers to "highway" miles (length of highway) rather than "lane" miles (the combined length of all lanes).

Source: Texas Department of Transportation



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