

Transportation Legislation of the 84th Session

Dedicating general and motor vehicle sales tax to the State Highway Fund

- Under a deal struck by House and Senate leaders in the Legislature's final days, Texans will vote in November on a constitutional amendment that would dedicate a portion of future motor vehicle sales taxes to the highway fund. The state would transfer 35% of that revenue stream's growth beyond \$5 billion beginning in 2020.
- If approved, the amendment would dedicate an additional \$2.5 billion of the general sales tax revenue to the highway fund beginning in 2017, and to continue to dedicate all revenues in excess of \$28 billion through 2032. Both funding streams would have triggers attached to them in case of downswings in the state economy.
- The legislature, however, is only spending existing dollars on transportation rather than creating any new revenue streams, taking away funding that could otherwise be spent on other priorities, such as education.

Ensuring gas tax revenue meant for transportation is spent on transportation

- Currently, 15 cents of the state's 20 cent gas tax is supposed to go towards transportation funding, but portions have been taken for other uses. Budget writers this session ended about \$1.3 billion in future diversions, in which gas tax money was going to pay for other items, mainly the Department of Public Safety.

Making TxDOT project prioritization more transparent

- The Governor signed legislation on Tuesday to require performance measures and metrics to be integrated into an annual review of statewide planning, rural planning, and the unified transportation program, which is TxDOT's 10-year project schedule.
- Local transportation entities such as CAMPO will also be required to develop guidelines for funding transportation projects based on a scoring system evaluating how well projects address congestion, safety, maintenance, and connectivity.

Reviewing state policies on toll roads

- TxDOT will now be required to submit a report listing the amount of debt service bonds issued for each toll projects in the state and identifying bonds that would be good candidates for accelerated or complete lump-sum payment of debt service.
- Additionally, TxDOT must propose a plan to eliminate all toll roads in the state except for tolls on roads constructed, operated, or maintained only with proceeds from the issuance of bonds by a tolling entity other than TxDOT. However, the agency will not be obligated to stop participating in private toll projects, nor is the Legislature required to act.

Rep. Israel's Transportation Agenda

Reducing congestion by making it easier for state employees to telecommute

- Working with Senator Watson, Rep. Israel sent SB 1032 to the Governor, which had the potential to reduce rush hour traffic by encouraging state agencies to develop department-wide telecommuting policies. Sadly it was vetoed along with over 40 other bills.

Requiring the DMV to keep track of electric and hybrid vehicles

- Rep. Israel also passed HB 735, directing the DMV to keep a record of the number of alternatively fueled vehicles in the state so that estimates of fuel tax revenues can be more accurate.

Allowing buses to drive on highway shoulders

- HB 1324 would have allowed buses to utilize highway shoulders in order to bypass congestion, making transit more reliable through the use of existing infrastructure. Although the bill gained broad-based support in the House, the bill did not receive a hearing in the Senate.

Incentivizing large trucks to use toll roads to bypass Central Austin traffic

- Rep. Israel filed a bill to provide a discount for large trucks on state-owned portions of the SH 130 tollway so that they would reroute away from IH 35. Although the bill did not get out of committee, Rep. Israel and Sen. Watson were able to get a provision included in a budget rider encouraging TxDOT to sell surplus property to pay for the discount program.