



Mayors of Dallas, other big Texas cities call for more state aid at Fort Worth conclave

By TRISTAN HALLMAN

Staff Writer

thallman@dallasnews.com

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Hey, Austin, how about a little help over here?

That's what the mayors and one city council member of Texas' 15 most populous cities asked at a conference Monday in Fort Worth.

Pointing to population growth and increasing demand for infrastructure and services, the mayors said they'll need more money from the state Legislature, as well as greater cooperation among cities, if they are going to govern effectively.

"We're just asking Austin not to play Washington, and just partner with us," Dallas Mayor Mike Rawlings said.

The mayors offered few specifics at a news conference after their closed-door meeting at Texas Motor Speedway. But the get-together allowed them to discuss transportation, water, homelessness and education.

"We all have to get on the same page with our asks," Irving Mayor Beth Van Duyne said.

The mayors said they don't believe there is a "silver bullet" revenue stream that could finance more roads and public transit. But they bandied about the idea of a statewide gas tax increase or allowing localities the option to raise gas taxes.

The Legislature has squelched both ideas in recent sessions — even with statewide budget shortfalls that left lawmakers scrounging for money.

Many state representatives and senators — who are more sensitive to voters' concerns than to local city councils' desires — couldn't stomach tax increases during a recession.

But that isn't stopping the mayors from asking.

"I don't know that they're going to change their minds this year, but we have to continue to raise these issues," Houston Mayor Annise Parker said.

As important as new revenue streams are, the state needs to bring back some old ones, the mayors said. They said they'd call on the state to restore funding to education and services for the homeless.

The state cut \$5.4 billion from schools during the last legislative session. A \$20 million homeless program that started in 2009 was also scrapped in 2011, but some money has since been restored.

Water was also a hot topic. Earlier this year, the mayors from Dallas, Irving, Fort Worth and Arlington announced their commitment to regional water conservation, but with limited success.

Dallas passed a twice-weekly restriction on lawn irrigation. But the city was left hanging out to dry when the other three mayors couldn't persuade their city councils to pass their own ordinances.

But Van Duyne said the Irving council will discuss water restrictions at its budget retreat next month, and Fort Worth Mayor Betsy Price said she'll continue to press the water issue as well.

Rawlings said he's pleased that other mayors are still committed to saving water. And he's hopeful that with a unified voice and a little economic luck, the Legislature will heed the mayors' municipal concerns. The consequences are too great not to, he said.

"Look, we ain't going to continue to grow if we don't have long-term water, if we don't have a transportation system and if we don't educate our kids," he said.

Follow Tristan Hallman on Twitter at @TristanHallman.

AT A GLANCE: The attendees

The mayors and one city council member of Texas' 15 most populous cities gathered for a conference Monday in Fort Worth.

- Mayor Paul Harpole, Amarillo
- Mayor Robert Cluck, Arlington
- Mayor Lee Leffingwell, Austin
- Mayor Joe Adame, Corpus Christi
- Mayor Mike Rawlings, Dallas
- Mayor Mark Burroughs, Denton*
- Mayor John Cook, El Paso
- Mayor Betsy Price, Fort Worth
- Mayor Ronald Jones, Garland
- Mayor Charles England, Grand Prairie
- Mayor Annise Parker, Houston
- Mayor Beth Van Duyne, Irving
- Mayor Raul Salinas, Laredo
- Mayor Glen Robertson, Lubbock
- Mayor Phil Dyer, Plano
- City Council member Ray Lopez, San Antonio

**Denton is not one of the state's 15 largest cities.*