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TxDOT director says agency needs \$1B alone to shore up maintenance budget

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By Tom Benning / Reporter
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With state lawmakers already beginning the discussion about how to address Texas' growing transportation needs, Texas Department of Transportation Executive Director Phil Wilson helped Thursday to define the debate's starting point.

TxDOT needs an additional \$1 billion-a-year alone to shore up its maintenance budget, he said. And going forward, the agency will likely need another \$3 billion-a-year infusion to its current \$10 billion annual budget to "address congestion long-term with a sustainable method."

"It's important that these issues be addressed, and I believe there is the will there to take a look at how we can bring more resources to bear long-term," Wilson said at an I-35W Coalition meeting at Texas Motor Speedway.

The need to boost TxDOT's budget is no surprise for state leaders, several of whom mentioned during this legislative session's opening days the importance of tackling transportation and other infrastructure.

TxDOT's budget is heavily reliant on a 20-cents-a-gallon state gas tax, which hasn't be raised since 1991. Inflation – along with increased fuel efficiency, which allows drivers to fill up less often – has dramatically reduced the agency's purchasing power over the years.

If nothing changes in the next two years, growing maintenance costs will soon leave no room in TxDOT's budget for construction or expansion projects.

"That's just math," Wilson said.

Lawmakers have already proposed several ideas to boost transportation funding, ev

The top ideas appear to be rededicating sales tax revenue on vehicle purchases to 1 include ending diversions from the gas tax revenue and taking \$1 billion from the sta

Wilson declined to offer support for any specific funding proposals, saying "it's a leg resources they bring to bear."

But, he added, "there's a lot of desire from both the House and Senate – and the governor – to address infrastructure needs for the future."

And Wilson did offer backing for a couple broader proposals that could nonetheless impact TxDOT's financial standing.

He said he hoped the Legislature would continue to approve public-private partnerships, such as LBJ Express or North Tarrant Express. Those efforts, known as "comprehensive development agreements," typically featured managed toll lanes and allow for expedited project timelines.

Wilson also said something needs to be done to address the road damage associated with oil and gas development. Drilling a single well, he said, is equivalent to adding nearly 8 million cars to a road, and many rural roads aren't built for that kind of traffic pressure.

"How do we figure that out and make sure we have good solid roads?" he said.

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