



Dallas pans state's planned shift of urban road costs to cities and counties



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Add Dallas and Mayor Mike Rawlings to the list of those panning a Texas Department of Transportation proposal to transfer maintenance of select state highways to local governments.

Rawlings and City Council member Vonciel Jones Hill wrote on Friday to TxDOT Executive Director Phil Wilson that the city "strenuously opposes" the plan to hand over control of 1,900 miles of urban roads to cities and counties.

The extra maintenance costs for those local governments would total \$165 million a year statewide. Dallas officials said in the letter to Wilson that the plan was "unfair" and "leans heavily toward double taxation."

"This proposal will save taxpayers no money since it merely shifts costs from one branch of government to another," Rawlings and Hill wrote. "Taxpayers would not pay less. Their money would simply be spent at a different level of government."

Fort Worth and the Texas Municipal League have also voiced opposition to the proposal. Texas Transportation Commissioner Victor Vandergriff, an Arlington businessman, has said he has reservations about the idea.

Vandergriff and four other transportation commissioners will discuss the proposal at a meeting Friday in Austin. No action will be taken then, and TxDOT officials have stressed that they merely want to begin a conversation on possible cost-cutting measures.

The general idea is that many state farm-to-market roads and highways have evolved into city streets that serve local traffic. TxDOT puts about 100 miles of roads in Dallas in that category and is considering them for the "turnback" program.

TxDOT officials have said those roads might be better served under city or county control. Wilson has noted that the local governments would then have final say over things like driveway access, speed limits and maintenance schedules.

Rawlings and Hill acknowledged that potential — under certain circumstances — in their letter to Wilson. They pointed out that Dallas had already taken control of a portion of Irving Boulevard, but only so the city could determine design features on a larger project.

"In that case, Dallas' acquisition of the highway was the most efficient use of funds," they wrote. "Such would not be the case with multiple urban state highways imposed upon Dallas through the 'Turnback' program."

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