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Texas highways Congestion is costing billions

by [STATE SEN. JUAN "CHUY" HINOJOSA](#)

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By now, it's no secret that Texas roads and highways need fixing. Chances are that you sat in traffic today longer than you wanted. By the end of the year, it is projected that the average Texan will lose 44 hours sitting in traffic this year alone. In 15 years, that wasted time doubles. That is almost 90 hours a year or almost four full days.

That wasted time in traffic carries a cost, a hidden tax on Texas drivers and families.

A study by TRIP, a national transportation research group, suggests the condition of Texas roads could be costing Texas drivers as much as \$2,000 a year. The study also states issues including traffic congestion, damage to vehicles from roads needing repair and costs incurred in accidents caused by insufficient safety features on roadways cost drivers in Texas \$23 billion annually.

The Texas Transportation Institute also found that congestion costs our state economy \$10.8 billion per year.

The demand for roadway space has grown much faster than the supply of that space. It is estimated 1,000 people are moving to Texas every day and our infrastructure needs to be able to support this growth. In the past 40 years, our population has grown 125 percent; vehicular use has increased 172 percent and highway use has increased 238 percent. But highway space has only increased a mere 19 percent.

For decades, our state highway system was efficient, expeditious and the envy of other states. Our highways made Texas the economic powerhouse that it is today. For years Texas' population has boomed and the state has prospered from it. But that prosperity is now threatened. With demand for road space far outpacing supply, the lack of investment in our transportation infrastructure could bring our economy to its knees.

Investing in our transportation system is an economic and social imperative. The cost of doing nothing will cost billions of dollars, kill thousands of jobs, slow the transport of valuable commerce, stifle Texans' productivity and hamper our quality of life.

With federal highway funds heading toward a fiscal cliff later this summer and the gridlock in Congress, one thing is clear when it comes to funding transportation: Texas needs to take care of Texas.

Any serious solution for funding transportation needs to be long-term and sustainable. We cannot borrow our way out of this hole. We can no longer afford to kick the can down the road as it becomes more difficult and more expensive to finance needed transportation projects. Our families can no longer afford the hidden taxes of our inadequate transportation system.

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The Texas Department of Transportation estimates that an additional \$5 billion per year will be needed to address our current transportation issues. Last year, the Legislature made a step in the right direction by approving approximately \$1.2 billion per year for transportation funding. These funds must be approved by voters in November since it would be drawn from the Texas Economic Stabilization Fund, also known as the Rainy Day Fund. The Rainy Day Fund is projected to carry a balance of \$12 billion dollars by the end of the fiscal biennium.

Even if the ballot measure is approved this November, the Texas Legislature must still come up with a viable "Texas solution" to fill the \$4 billion difference to remedy our transportation inadequacies. As a member of the Senate Select Committee on Transportation Funding, I look forward to weighing all options and remain committed to delivering a sustainable funding solution to provide the transportation infrastructure our state needs and Texans deserve.

Hinojosa, a Democrat, represents District 20, which includes McAllen and Mission. He is a member of the Senate Select Committee on Transportation Funding.

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