

Road funding problem far from resolved

EXPRESS-NEWS EDITORIAL BOARD : AUGUST 16, 2013 : Updated: August 16, 2013 4:23pm

The Legislature's proposal to divert funds from the state's rainy day fund to pay for transportation projects offers only a partial fix to

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The Legislature's decision to ask voters to approve using part of the rainy day fund for transportation is a decent first step, but it doesn't solve the state's long-term problem.

a steadily growing problem and is good only as long as the oil and gas boom continues.

Texas voters, in November 2014, will be asked to approve a constitutional amendment that would allow the use of some of the oil and gas production tax revenues earmarked for the state's economic stabilization funds, also known as the rainy day fund, for transportation.

The legislation also includes a requirement that the Legislature vote in 2025 to eliminate or continue the siphoning and mandates the appointment of a joint committee of legislators to recommend a minimum balance for the rainy day fund before each regular legislative session.

The Comptroller's Office is estimating the fund will have about \$8.5 billion after November deposits, and Lt. Gov. **David Dewhurst** is urging a minimum balance of \$6 billion to \$7 billion for the next biennium.

That could translate to about \$1.2 billion a year for

Texas Department of Transportation construction projects if the amendment is approved, but it is only a portion of the \$4 billion necessary to meet the state's growing transportation infrastructure needs.

Gov. **Rick Perry** has been adamant about funding transportation without raising taxes or imposing new fees, but that approach does not provide a long-term solution to a problem that could undermine the state's economic development plans.

Between 2000 and 2012, the state's population grew by 5.21 million residents. That population growth has been coupled with traffic congestion and a need to expand our highway system.

Revenue from the state's gasoline tax, a primary source of funding for state highway projects, has not kept up with the need.

The tax has been set at 20 cents per gallon since 1991. Texas would be better able to address transportation needs if lawmakers would index the gas tax to inflation so it can keep pace.

It is troubling that key state leaders would allow the state to revert to gravel roads in the Eagle Ford Shale region rather than find permanent solution that will adequately address the problem.

Punting the transportation funding issue to the voters in the fall of 2014 does not resolve the problem or make it go away.

The need will still be there when the Legislature convenes in 2015.

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