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News

Texas Senate approves bill to make regional mobility authorities subject to state audit

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AUSTIN – Local transportation agencies would be subject to state audit under a bill that the Texas Senate approved Monday.

Sen. Don Huffines, a Dallas Republican who filed the bill on March 10, said the state and taxpayers deserve additional scrutiny of the local agencies, which are referred to as regional mobility authorities.

He said his legislation would "bring greater oversight and transparency in how we finance and manage transportation infrastructure in the state."

During brief remarks on the Senate floor, Huffines also [cited an investigation of regional mobility authorities posted May 1 on dallasnews.com and published by The Dallas Morning News on May 3.](#)

Nearly 15 years after the legislature enabled local governments to set up the agencies, *The News* reported that some of the nine regional mobility authorities have completed no roadway projects at all. Others have spent millions on projects that critics have said are unnecessary.

The RMAs have spent about \$220 million on overhead costs, according to *The News'* analysis. They've spent about \$864 million in state and federal funds, despite the Texas Legislature hoping the projects would be financed almost exclusively by tolls.

Agency leaders have defended their track records. They point to \$1.5 billion of projects they say would not have been built without them.

Without debate, the Senate voted 29-2 to approve Huffines' bill.

Sens. Troy Fraser, R-Horseshoe Bay, and Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo, voted no.

Huffines said if his bill becomes law, the state auditor's office would conduct an annual "risk assessment" of the nine RMAs. If there were grounds for an audit, the cost would come out of the state audit's budget, he added.

The bill moves to the House, where the Transportation Committee would have to approve the measure and then ship it to the full House.

But time is running out. The regular legislative session ends June 1.

The state requires RMAs to submit annual reports about whether they comply with state laws and rules, and the status of their projects. They also are required to hire a firm to conduct an annual audit.

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