

Just Say NO to Privatization Schemes

The issue before us is how to fund Texas roads. We have 3 options: increase the gas tax, pile up debt or toll.

The toll road schemes involve the seizure of private property for the benefit of privatized foreign toll road operators who will be given a monopoly license on roads they control. This is very wrong and reeks of the fascist marriage of big business and big government. Moreover, there is scant evidence that any private capital whatsoever is even pouring into these project. More horrifying is that fact that these privatized toll road projects can't even secure revenue bond financing and are demanding the full faith and credit of the state of Texas.

If the Banksters on Wall Street won't underwrite these transportation projects with revenue bonds then why should 25 million Texans be on the hook to bond holders for privatization schemes that are far more likely to fail than succeed?

The South Carolina Connector is in default with a \$163 million deficiency because interest expense alone is 10 times operating profits. The history of privatized toll roads reek of defaults which is why Wall Street is no longer willing to underwrite revenue bond for these projects. In truth, there is no private capitol and the debt burden is so overwhelming that these projects are not economically viable.

Currently the North Texas Tollway Authority is financially over extended and it's been reported that it seeks to have its revenue bonds carry the full faith and credit of Texas. This indicates that yet another transportation project is facing financial troubles while seeking taxpayer bailouts.

Citizens are beginning to wonder how many legislators have been bought and paid for by Wall Street and the toll road industry that are delivering nothing of value to Texans while costing us a bloody fortune.

More to the point, the Texas Legislature continues to siphon funds out of our gas tax dollars and allocate these funds to other agencies, presumably so TXDOT and the Texas Legislature can then plead there is no money for Texas Roads.

Excerpted from the San Antonio Express 7/9/07

More than one-third of the money Texas motorists pay in driving taxes and fees is diverted into spending on projects that do not contribute to the upkeep and expansion of the road network. Texans pay \$3.5 billion into the fund annually through the gas tax and various vehicle licensing fees that apply only to drivers. Of this amount, nearly \$1.5 billion is spent on items more properly funded with general revenue, including \$725 million on public education and \$765 million on social welfare programs including tourism and medical care.

The following table shows the two-year budget spending on projects that do not contribute to the upkeep and expansion of the Texas road network. Supplied by the Texas Department of Transportation, as printed in the San Antonio Express News.

Agency	Amount Diverted
Department of Public Safety	\$1,245,108,574
Texas Education Agency	\$100,000,000
Medical Trans-Medicaid Match	\$85,381,725
Salary Increase for Schedule C	\$22,291,710
Client Transportation Services	\$22,363,606
Health and Human Services Commission	\$20,000,000
Texas Workforce Commission	\$13,658,704
Gross Weight Axle Fees	\$10,800,000
State Office of Administrative Hearings	\$6,736,396
Attorney General: Mineral Rights Litigation	\$1,700,000
Commission on the Arts	\$1,340,000
Historical Commission	\$1,000,000
Regulation of Controlled Substances	\$804,972
Silver Alert for Missing Senior Citizens	\$224,990
Lufkin Tourist Information Center	\$150,000
<i>Total</i>	<i>\$1,531,560,677</i>

Source: <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/18/1852.asp>

The Texas Legislature apparently considers our gas tax dollars to be their personal slush funds to squander as they please. This is unacceptable.

Texans have no way of knowing how many tens of billions of our gas tax dollars have been siphoned off for non-transportation projects. This constitutes an act of unconscionable abuse of public trust and irresponsible legislative shenanigans because there was money to fund Texas roads.

The moral, ethical and legal responsibility of the Texas Legislature is accountability to the public and the prudent use of our tax dollars.

For the Texas Legislature to continue with its pillaging of our gas tax dollars while shoving down our throats higher transportation costs associated with massive debt and privatization schemes is a complete and total abrogation of its duty to the people of Texas.

When wheeling and dealing dirty deals for special interests trumps the needs of the people of Texas, it's definitely time for a change in elected leadership.

So the answer to my question on toll roads, debt or gas tax increases is that the gas tax is the sanest and fairest use tax in existence. But if Texans can't even trust their corrupt to the core legislature to be the guardians of their gas tax dollars and use the money for its intended purpose, there is no way on God's green earth that additional transportation schemes will deliver Texans cost effective transportation. In fact, the financial burden of these CDA transportation schemes will result in horrifically unnecessary burdens to the people of Texas who are about to be strangled with huge increases in transportation costs.

Texans deserve better than the shabby treatment they have received from the Texas Legislature. It's time to have an independent audit of TXDOT, end the squandering our gas tax dollars that cost us dearly at the pump and use our transportation dollars to build roads.

Judy Morris
1410 Wild Vine Cove
Round Rock, TX 78665
Jmorris49@sbcglobal.net