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## Texas Leaders Discuss Fee Hikes for Road Projects

### **TxDOT: Something must be in place by 2012.**

By Nik Rajkovic

Wednesday, January 26, 2011

Despite an \$8 billion annual budget, the Texas Department of Transportation is expected to run out of money for new projects in 2012. Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst now is pushing higher registration fees to make up the difference.

State leaders are talking a \$20 annual hike for a typical vehicle in Texas, and even higher fees for 18-wheelers.

Tx-DOT's Karen Amacker insists the money has to come from somewhere.

"Unless new funding sources are in place by next year, TxDOT won't be able to add any additional mobility projects," Amacker says. "That is projects that would relieve congestion or add lanes to our highway system."

However, Terri Hall with TURF -- or Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom -- say a gas tax is fairer.

"An across the board registration fee hike, everybody's paying it when it may not really be the people who are using our roads the most," says Hall. "Our gas tax really is the perfect way to do it, which is what we've always been advocating. The more you use it, the more you pay."

Talmadge Heflin at the Texas Public Policy Foundation says now is not the time to discuss any fee or tax hike.

"TxDOT first needs to improve, and state lawmakers need to fix the diversions from the current motor fuels tax," says Heflin. "And when the economy is trying to claw back into creating more jobs, it's not a good time to raise any fees or taxes."

Before any fee increases, lawmakers insist voters will have their say, and be given a list of projects that would be paid for with the fee hikes.

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