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Quick Take: North Texas will have to rely on state for road funding

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Later today, we'll know whether the giant transportation bill that has been deadlocked in the Legislature for the past week is on its way to the governor's desk, or whether Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, has succeeded in talking it to death.

But this much we know for certain: The local-option tax proposal, the one tool North Texas leaders said would give the region a fighting chance to thin out its traffic and clean up its air, is not going to pass. Carona said Sunday: "Local-option is absolutely, positively dead."

So North Texas will have to rely on the state transportation department to fund its roads. That's not an especially cheery prospect for local leaders.

"We are running out of money" for highways, Carona said, adding he could only speculate why lawmakers haven't acted. After all, the need is only growing as our roads age and the population grows.

Not everyone in North Texas, of course, believed asking voters to pay more was a good idea. But very few would disagree that lawmakers are headed home today having done little to help fast-growing cities like Dallas and Fort Worth.

North Texas leaders have gone with hat in hand to Austin every session for the past six years.

So far the Legislature and Gov. Rick Perry have offered just two solutions: private toll roads and billions of dollars in costly debt.

But private toll roads are about played out. And every dollar the agency borrows only adds to the interest it must pay.

Local leaders saw the local-option tax as North Texas' best hope for something to change that equation. Instead, Dallas drivers can get used to worsening traffic and dirty air, and say goodbye to ambitions like suburban rail.

Some help may come from Washington, where lawmakers are forming a new transportation-funding approach. But counting on Washington is probably about as reliable as counting on Austin.

