

# North Texas transportation panel will keep pushing for local-option tax

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Regional Transportation Council leaders vowed Thursday to continue to push for a local-option tax proposal that failed in the 2009 Texas Legislature.

It was the third straight session where North Texas leaders failed to win approval to call elections so voters could choose to pay more for transportation improvements.

"We are not going to go away," said Fort Worth City Council member Jungus Jordan, who was elected secretary of the regional policy-setting board Thursday. "We cannot stop making noise because the problem is not going away, and we have got the solution."

But the council's new chairman said backers spent so much time convincing fellow leaders to support the idea, they forgot to win over average voters.

"The thing we lacked was having our citizens [back home] engaged in this issue," Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley said. "I don't think any of us really believed that the opposition would be more successful in getting the grassroots support [than we were]."

That needs to change when the issue is back before lawmakers in 2011, or even sooner if the governor can be convinced to add the funding issue to the special session he said he would call.

"Do us a favor and get us an e-mail list of 100 of your best friends, and if you don't have that many, send us what you have, or maybe add a few enemies," Whitley said.

The proposal would have allowed counties to ask voters to agree to spend as much as \$10 billion or more in new taxes over the next 20 years. It enjoyed strong support from most North Texas elected officials, but several area lawmakers emerged as key opponents late in the stormy session.

Rep. Linda Harper-Brown, R-Irving, who had remained neutral on the bill for months, came out strongly opposed to it in the final weeks. Among other things, she objected to the way the bill would have, in her view, rewarded cities that for years have refused to join DART but would have been given tools to fast-track rail development.

The bill also gained only lukewarm support from the House transportation committee chairman and was ultimately opposed by Republican Gov. Rick Perry.

Still, its two main sponsors, Rep. Vicki Truitt, R-Keller, and Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, were hailed as heroes by the RTC on Thursday. Truitt vowed to keep pushing for the bill, and has said she will ask Perry to include it in the call for a special session he has said he will issue later this year, or next.

Perry spokeswoman Allison Castle said Thursday it's too soon to tell whether he will include funding issues on the agenda. The prospects seem unlikely, some RTC leaders said.