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Editorials  

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## Instead of hiding in the shadows, Texas lawmakers should vote on transportation funding

For six years, a number of Dallas-Fort Worth elected officials and other leaders have pushed the Legislature to let residents decide how to remedy the region's transportation problems. The approach has changed during that time, but the founding principle has not:

Let people vote.

Any remedy for clogged freeways and polluted air will cost money, and voters can decide whether they are willing to pay.

Now it's legislators' time to vote. We need to know where they stand, each and every one of them.

Many House members dread facing the issue. Some see the strengths of the proposal but fear that allowing local-option transportation funding will be seen through a narrow prism and interpreted solely as allowing higher taxes.

They should look at it differently. It allows Texans who have problems to take them into their own hands on a local basis. Areas of the state that don't have transportation problems don't have to get involved.

Legislators have a way to escape voting on this issue. They should not use it.

A local-option transportation funding bill passed the Senate on April 14 but died in the House without a vote. Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, attached similar language as an amendment to a House-passed bill overhauling the Texas Transportation Department and increasing legislative oversight of it.

That bill is at a crucial point. A conference committee is expected to resolve differences between the House and Senate versions, and one of the key differences is the local-option amendment.

Those who would rather see local option die would like to kill it quietly in conference. Conference committee members from the House could refuse to accept the amendment, dig in their heels and refuse to budge.

What's accomplished if local option dies that way? Simply this: House members get to hide in the shadows. They were sent to Austin to help the state deal with tough issues, but on this one they would never have to cast a vote.

That's not right. They should step out into the sunlight.

The amendment poses no threat to the Transportation Department overhaul or to the agency itself. If that bill gets voted down because House members just can't stomach the local-option amendment, it can be brought up again later. Gov. Rick Perry has discussed calling a special session soon to deal with work left unaccomplished after the regular session.

Our guess is that lawmakers will step up and do the right thing: When they are forced to make a choice, they will approve local-option funding because it is the only way serious transportation problems in the state's major metropolitan areas can be solved. The state will soon run out of money to build new transportation projects, and other funding options do not measure up to the challenge.

The Transportation Department bill, HB 300, should come out of the conference committee with the local-option amendment intact. The House and Senate should vote on it.

We want to know where everyone stands.

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Online To read House Bill 300, go to the Texas Legislature Online at [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us)