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Rose backs bond

Opponents say endorsement not appropriate

By Brad Rollins
Staff Reporter

San Marcos — State Rep. Patrick M. Rose has waded into the fray over the highway construction proposition on Saturday's ballot, urging voters to approve the \$172 million deal.

His letter distributed by road bond supporters on Wednesday acknowledges concerns about the aesthetic impact of a planned widening of Ranch Road 12 to five lanes. He said he would work with officials to make sure "context sensitive solutions" are used to minimize the effect of changes to a 10.3 mile stretch of the road between San Marcos and the intersection with Ranch Road 32 outside Wimberley.

"The road package is not perfect, but it represents a rare opportunity for Hays County to leverage over \$130 million in state transportation funds for road improvements that we desperately need. ...This could be the last opportunity we have in Hays County for such a substantial state investment," the Dripping Springs Democrat said.

Hays County Prop. 1 would authorize the sale of \$172 million in bonds to pay for the Ranch Road 12 improvements as well as adding lanes to a six-mile stretch of Farm-to-Market Road 1626; adding shoulders and turn lanes to Texas 21; building a three-mile segment of Farm-to-Market Road 110, the San Marcos loop. Prop. 2, also endorsed by Rose, would set aside \$30 million to buy and preserve parklands and open space.

Rose's heavyweight endorsement puts him at odds with some in his own party and drew immediate reaction from a group opposing the bonds.

Rose "using his office to influence those voters who trust his judgment constitutes undue influence and in my opinion goes beyond the pale," said Charles O'Dell, a spokesperson for Hays County Citizens for Responsible Roads.

Besides Rose, the package is supported by Democrats like Pct. 2 Commissioner Jeff Barton and former Sheriff Don Montague. Pct. 1 Commissioner Debbie Gonzales Ingalsbe has not formally endorsed the packaged but spoke consistently in support of each of the proposed projects. In February she said: "I personally think all of these roads are really important. ... I do support building all of these roads, including the loop, but I also think we need public approval."

County Judge Elizabeth Sumter and Pct. 4 Commissioner Karen Ford, also Democrats, have maintained public neutrality. Likewise, Republicans are not of one mind on the issue either. Former Pct. 2 Commissioner Susie Carter has campaigned against the package.

But in an interview with the Daily Record, Sumter on Wednesday said flatly that Rose is mistaken about the opportunity to alter the Ranch Road 12 plans.

"That just isn't a possibility under this road bond package. We tried to convince TxDOT to do that, to downscale their plans, before we put it out [for a vote]. The answer was a flat no," Sumter said, adding that "if the package were to fail, I believe TxDOT is going to be willing to come to the table and talk about where to go from there."




In his letter, Rose also referenced another highly traveled road, Farm-to-Market Road 1826, about \$20 million for which was briefly included in the bond proposal before being pulled by Ford. Rose said, "...It was an unfortunate, missed opportunity that essential safety and surface quality improvements to FM 1826 were not included in this bond package."

Ford said she wanted to group the ballot proposals separately, one for the package negotiated by Pct. 3 Commissioner Will Conley before the November change of power and a second for FM 1826, Texas 21 and other county roads. She initially consented to including FM 1826 in Prop. 1 at a workshop in March before saying she had changed her mind after the court returned from a lunch break.

"I never felt 100 percent comfortable with it being in there in the first place knowing that we didn't have our deal (with TxDOT on FM 1826) hammered out before we needed to call the election. I didn't necessarily think what was on the table was a good deal for taxpayers," Ford said.

The polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Saturday for the county bond election as well as a \$14.3 million proposal to finish the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District's school construction and renovation program.

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