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## No to road bonds

Voters ditch plans for transportation projects

**By Brad Rollins**  
Staff Reporter

County officials will have to start from scratch on a plan for improving Hays County's overcrowded highways after voters narrowly rejected selling a \$172 million bond package.

With all precincts reporting, 5,336 residents, 52.4 percent, voted against the package which would have widened stretches of Ranch Road 12 and Farm-to-Market Road 1626, build the first three miles of the San Marcos loop and matched safety improvements on Texas 21. A few more than 4,854 voted for the package, 47.6 percent of total turnout.

Besides the Texas 21 improvements, the future of the other projects is in the air following the vote. County Judge Elizabeth Sumter said she will move to form a citizen committee to identify the county's most pressing transportation needs.

"Any transportation program has to start with our citizens and end with our citizens. The lesson we learn from this election is that if you don't go to the citizens first to start the process, it doesn't get passed," said Sumter, who remained publicly neutral, but skeptical, on the package assembled by the old commissioners court turned out by voters in November.

Under an arrangement called pass-through financing, the Texas Department of Transportation would have reimbursed the county up to \$133 million over 20 years for the improvements. Some opponents seized on the local payout for state roads while others focused on specific projects, especially Ranch Road 12, the expansion of which to a five-lane road was not acceptable to many Wimberley residents.

One of the bond's most staunch supporters, Pct. 2 Commissioner Jeff Barton, said the results highlight a geographic divide between residents in the eastern half of the county, which generally supported the projects, and those in the western half, a more rural area that generally resisted what many saw as a threat to their country living.

Barton said, "I believed it was the best alternative out of a number of unattractive alternatives. We wanted others to pass judgment on it and they have. Now we move on to Plan B, although I'm not completely sure what Plan B is."

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