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Williamson County seeking TXDOT pass-through funds

By Brad Rollins
Staff Reporter

Watching to see if Hays County loses its deal with the Texas Department of Transportation, Williamson County officials on Wednesday applied for tens of millions of dollars in highway funding in an agreement similar to the one in limbo here.

In November, voters in that county approved \$276 million to upgrade county roads and state highways. Although not part of the package, Williamson County Judge Don Gattis said officials decided to commit part of the money to a pass-through financing agreement with TXDOT.

"It's just common sense to me. It's a program that allows us to leverage our money to get more roads with the dollars we have ... We dedicated some of our road bond money to the program because we know where going to get paid back and put that money back in circulation to do other projects," Gattis said.

The Hays County Commissioners Court this week voted to notify TXDOT officials that it does not want to cancel its agreement for \$133 million in reimbursements on \$172 million of road projects. But it is far from certain whether the answer will assure the state agency that the county reasonably expects to move forward with some of the projects in the foreseeable future.

Voters here decided against funding the agreement through general obligation bonds but the contract with TXDOT stands unless, or until, one of the sides cancels it. Mayor Susan Narvaiz, backed by local leaders including unanimous support of the San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District trustees, has been trying to convince county leaders to let the city of San Marcos take over at least \$29.3 million of the agreement for the first three-mile segment of Farm-to-Market Road 110, the San Marcos loop.

TXDOT Austin district engineer Bob Daigh could not be reached for comment due to illness, his office said; area engineer Don Nyland did not return a phone call on Wednesday.

With the prospect of \$133 million becoming available, officials in other counties are considering going after the money for their own projects. Although Comal County has not applied, Judge Don Scheel said, "If that money is going to be put back on the table, it's something I think we're going to be interested in."

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