

Hutchison lays out transportation plan for Texas

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U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison vowed Tuesday to "clean up" the Texas Department of Transportation, reduce traffic congestion and start building a high-speed rail network connecting Dallas, Houston and San Antonio if she is elected Texas governor.

Hutchison laid out her transportation plan Tuesday at campaign swings in Tyler, Waco and Dallas, with more stops scheduled Wednesday.

The senator proposed a series of reforms, including new restrictions on toll road construction and more checks on spending, while linking roads with railroads, airports and waterways. She also wants to make the Texas Transportation Commission a nine-member panel, up from five.

The senior U.S. senator from Texas gave little detail on how to pay for it all, saying she'll focus first on eliminating wasteful spending and inefficiencies in management. After that, if her proposed special transportation committee recommends new taxes or fees, she would put the issue before voters in regional referendums.

"Texans are tired of the traffic and congestion in our cities. They are frustrated with the arrogance and inefficiencies of the leadership at the Texas Department of Transportation that have failed to produce results," Hutchison said. "One of my top priorities as governor will be to clean up TxDOT and solve the transportation problems that have plagued Texas for the last decade."

Hutchison, who hopes to oust Gov. Rick Perry in the March Republican primary, has been a vocal critic of TxDOT, calling it the "most arrogant" agency in state government. In her remarks Tuesday, she called for more transparency and enhanced financial controls, taking note of TxDOT's embarrassing admission last year that it had made a \$1 billion budgeting error by counting income twice.

Hutchison said she'd eventually like to see a high-speed rail network in the "Texas Triangle," linking the Dallas-Fort Worth area with Houston and San Antonio. The cities make up the most populous areas of the state.

The Perry campaign, which has portrayed Hutchison as a free-spending Washington insider, said she failed to spell out where the money would come from to pay for her proposals.

"After 16 years in Washington, it's no surprise the only thing Sen. Hutchison proposed today was a plan that will require billions of tax dollars and grow government bureaucracy," Perry spokesman Mark Miner said. "Creating a new committee and expanding the TxDOT commission will not build one new road in Texas."

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