

*Dallas Morning News*

## **Editorial: Bleak transportation picture**

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Imagine the North Texas highway system 20 years from now if Austin fails to deliver more money to keep traffic congestion from getting worse. Here's a sample of what might be pulled off the drawing board:

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The massive Pegasus project, which would unsnarl the impossible tangle of freeways in the center of [Dallas](#).

Widening of LBJ from the [Richardson](#) area, down through [Garland](#) and [Mesquite](#) and points south.

The Southern Gateway project to widen and improve U.S. 67 and I-35E in southern Dallas.

Any part of the Loop 9 super-outer loop around the metro area.

Rebuilding I-35E north into Denton.

Widening and improving U.S. 75 from [Plano](#) to [McKinney](#).

Widening of I-30 in Rockwall County.

Improving Loop 12 in southwest Dallas and [Irving](#), and State Highway 183 in Irving.

The list goes on, affecting highway projects across most every patch of booming North Texas. Planners say today's average commute of 20 minutes in each direction would spike to 55 if improvements are shelved.

Why do we toss out this bleak scenario? Two reasons:

One, lawmakers in Austin are mostly reluctant to confront this picture, because to do so would obligate them to find solutions – and that costs money. Two, the public has its own

short-sighted perspective. In a recent statewide poll, about four of every 10 Texans said they would cut highway spending to get the state out of its budget jam.

The question amounted to a false choice, since the highway budget is a stand-alone fund supported by motor-fuel taxes, and cutting it wouldn't help such areas as schools or health programs.

But a danger lurks in these poll numbers. Lawmakers might use them to proclaim transportation a low priority, then kick the problem down the road.

That would make things only worse. Fact is, highway money is not keeping up with demand for roads; the state needs to bump up the gas tax for the first time in 19 years. If lawmakers don't find fresh revenue, new highway projects will be put on hold as of 2012, Texas Department of Transportation officials testified this month at a joint meeting of the Texas Senate and House transportation committees.

State and local leaders must continue to focus attention on what our communities would look and feel like if lawmakers turned their backs on traffic congestion. From where we sit, the picture isn't pretty.