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# Texas' lack of focus on high-speed rail made it miss out on federal funds, Hutchison says

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**BY ANNA M. TINSLEY**

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FORT WORTH -- U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison is disappointed that Texas was essentially shut out of the recent \$8 billion federal giveaway to help states advance high-speed rail.

Long-standing plans have called for a high-speed network to pass through the Metroplex, linking North Texas with St. Louis and Chicago to the north and San Antonio to the south, but Hutchison said leaders haven't focused enough on what high-speed rail could do for the state.

"We've never had any innovation at the state level nor embracing of it," she told the *Star-Telegram's* Editorial Board on Friday. The Texas Department of Transportation "has completely ignored rail."

"It has to be part of the overall transportation planning for Texas," she said.

Local and federal officials have said a lack of a coordinated effort may have led to Texas' loss of funds, but they say they have taken key steps, such as creating a rail division in the Transportation Department and appointing Bill Glavin to lead the effort to find common ground.

Texas' plans range from upgrading Amtrak tracks to help trains move at more than 100 mph to building elevated tracks for European-style bullet trains, which could shuttle travelers across long distances at more than 185 mph.

"I am for high-speed rail," Hutchison said. "I would have gone after the federal funds. ...

"I'm not saying I would be for high-speed rail that would necessarily be new right of way. ... We should look at doing it within [existing] right of way," she said. "But there's a lot of room there."

Hutchison, seeking the Republican Party's gubernatorial nomination against incumbent Gov. Rick Perry and Tea Party activist Debra Medina, was in town to talk to the board and to hundreds attending a Leaders in Government lunch at the Petroleum Club.

The most recent Rasmussen poll shows Perry at 44 percent, Hutchison at 29 percent and Medina at 16 percent.

Hutchison began airing a TV commercial this week saying Perry has let lobbyists determine his policies.

The commercial shows how many members of Perry's staff had worked as lobbyists or left his office to work as lobbyists.

Perry's campaign staff says Hutchison herself has a long-standing association with lobbyists. They also say Hutchison used more than \$10,000 in taxpayer money to repay donors, corporations and lobbyists for the use of their jets.

"Sen. Hutchison is using her federal office as an employment agency for Washington lobbyists," said Mark Miner, a Perry campaign spokesman.

Hutchison said her priorities include:

**Dropout rates:** She said a 30 percent dropout rate will not create an educated work force in Texas. She proposes a program that would identify sixth- and seventh-graders at risk of dropping out later, work with those students and get them up to speed to rejoin their class in the ninth grade. She also stresses the need to bring community colleges into high schools to help students who might otherwise not learn a trade.

**Transportation:** Hutchison said the Transportation Department is "the most arrogant state agency in the state of Texas, and I will change that." She said that the agency needs to work better with local governments and that she wants an audit to determine how taxpayer dollars are being spent. She also said she wants to increase the number of board members and reform the agency as a whole.

**Ethics and government reform:** Hutchison said she'd like to share the power delegated to the governor, from giving state lawmakers the ability to override vetoes to limiting how long governors may serve in office. She'd like lawmakers to be able to call themselves back into special session to override vetoes. And she'd like to limit the governor to two terms for a total of eight years. "I don't think Texans want one person to have so much power," she said.

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