

MOVE IT!

Lyceum meeting to tackle expected road-funds deficit

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Texas will come up short by about \$86 billion between the cost of road infrastructure needed by 2030 and the amount in available funds.

That is the Texas Department of Transportation's forecast in a recent report that predicts exponential increases in population, vehicles owned and miles traveled by motorists during the next 25 years.

Texas roads, as a result, are being strained, and the state can't build more fast enough.

In the report, the transportation department sets out to provide the Legislature with a road map for its next session.

Suggestions include: toll roads created with private-sector and state-matching funds; more emphasis on local and regional projects; and more commuter rail systems.

"With the demand for transportation increasing faster than the state's ability to build infrastructure," the report states, "the continuing transfers of transportation-related revenue, the unreliability of federal funding, and the steady

erosion of the purchasing power of the State Highway Fund, it is critical that Texas look to innovative financing methods to improve mobility in this state as quickly and efficiently as possible."

At least one group has even more in mind for the Legislature.

The Texas Lyceum, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group, will meet in Houston next month to tackle a laundry list of transportation issues. By the end of the daylong conference, a set of public policy priorities will be drafted for the Legislature and included in the annual Lyceum Journal.

The group also will include results of last year's statewide poll that found respondents wanted improved roads and highways, but were unwilling to pay for them through increased gas taxes or new tolls. (The gas tax has remained the same since 1991.)

During the conference, experts, state and local leaders will lead four panel discussions, followed by breakout sessions.

The aim is to produce a journal that "will be actively used in the deliberative process in the state Legislature and across the state," said Tim Belton, a Texas Lyceum Association director and president and CEO of TNR Entertainment Corp.

"Hurricane Ike made clear that we have infrastructure that's not built to last," he said. "That results in real serious disruption to our way of life."

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Sustainable infrastructure, air quality, state projects and financing options will be among the issues on the table.

The Texas Lyceum's 23rd annual public conference will be Dec. 3 at Reliant Arena. Tickets are \$175.

For more information on the conference and to register, visit www.texaslyceum.org.

Kirby construction on hold

On the subject of infrastructure, the ongoing street drainage system work in Houston's Upper Kirby District will be set aside to make way for holiday traffic.

Construction work will pause from Nov. 21 through Jan. 2, said Travis Younkin, capital projects coordinator for the Upper Kirby District.

Work along side streets will continue, though.

"We can't have construction crews working on the street during the busiest shopping season of the year," Younkin said.

The \$18 million project, managed by the Upper Kirby District Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone, is scheduled to be completed by next November.

Kirby, from Richmond to Westheimer, will have three somewhat wider lanes in each direction, raised esplanades, wider sidewalks and more street lighting.

Overhead utility lines also will be placed underground, which should reduce worries about downed power lines during storms that would otherwise paralyze Kirby businesses.

More changes are also expected with the completion of Metro's Richmond light rail line in 2012, Younkin said.

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