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## EDITORIAL

### TRANSPORTATION

# Paying to play

■ The Texas Legislature should allow local elections on whether to increase sales taxes to finance regional rail operations.

Dec. 11 is an important day for Texans concerned about getting from here to there in North Central Texas.

That's the day that the Regional Transportation Council will meet with local lawmakers to present its proposed legislative agenda for the 80th Texas Legislature, which convenes Jan. 9.

One item, perhaps the most singularly significant for this area, is elegant in its simplicity: *Support the Joint Recommendations for Regional Rail in North Central Texas.*

The joint resolution is an unprecedented move by the three area agencies that deal with public transportation: the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, Dallas Area Rapid Transit and the Denton County Transportation Authority.

What the resolution seeks — and it is supported by more than 50 city councils, county commissioners, courts, and business and civic organizations in North Central Texas — is authority from the Legislature to allow local elections on whether to increase the sales tax to finance regional rail operations.

In 2003, the editorial boards of *The Dallas Morning News* and the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* — a collaboration that was itself historic — called for a regional focus on meeting transit needs.

That call, in the description of one transit expert, brought the issue into unprecedented focus simultaneously for officials in more than 60 counties surrounding Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, the region's transportation hub.

People invited to the newspapers' summit — held on Aug. 15, 2003, on the closing day of the 6th Annual Texas Transportation Summit in Irving — called for working groups to study the issue. In some cases, existing task forces took up the challenge.

But three committees were created to deal with governance, financing and legal issues, drawn in part from people who volunteered at the newspaper summit.

On July 29, 2004, the committees overwhelmingly voted for a rail network to be funded by fares, federal grants and a half-cent sales tax in the parts of Tarrant, Dallas, Collin, Denton, Ellis and Johnson counties not in a transit authority.

From that came the decision to ask the Legislature for authority to increase the local sales tax.

Legislative action is needed because the state collects a 6.25 percent sales tax and permits cities to add another 2 cents. Most cities use at least 1 cent for general revenue; the other cent can be used for issues such as crime districts and economic development. DART members devote a penny to the system; members of The T pay a half-cent.

The proposal to the Legislature requests "a sales tax exemption for non-attainment areas of an amount equal to the locally authorized transit sales tax with a city-by-city, multiple city corridor, county, or sub-county vote to maximize local flexibility."

That language is complex but important. It would apply only to the nine counties in North Central Texas that the Environmental Protection Agency has designated as air-quality non-attainment areas. To make an increase acceptable, everyone has to have the opportunity to move equally — areas that earlier elected transit over other uses now could have both. Areas that elected to spend the money on uses other than transit could increase the money for transit — and the playing field for uses like economic development will remain level across the area. That would mean a cent in some areas and a half-cent in others.

For years, conventional wisdom has been that attempting to tax for rail transit was a lost cause. A recent study conducted for the North Texas

Commission indicates that conventional wisdom is wrong.

The researchers interviewed 4,077 people in the non-transit-member areas of Collin, Dallas and Tarrant counties and in parts of Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker and Rockwall counties and the member cities of the Fort Worth Transportation Authority where a half-cent is currently collected.

Initial support was surprisingly high — 62.9 percent — for a half-cent increase, and that rose to 74.7 percent when the question was repeated at the conclusion of the 12-minute survey. That's important in the areas of North Central Texas that are not already at 1 cent. Support weakened when interviewees were questioned about a full cent but was still strong.

The study, by the way, was conducted at the behest of state lawmakers in the last session who didn't believe residents would support a tax.

Lawmakers are resistant to changes in the sales tax. We'd like to think that's because they consider it a regressive tax. But the truth is that they've painted themselves into a corner by consistent and public pledges that they will not raise taxes. The sales tax is their safety valve.

But we are the ones who suffer every day with traffic congestion and its related problems. We are the ones facing a projected population increase of nearly 80 percent over three decades — 5.1 million in 2000 to 9.1 million in 2030.

And we should be the ones who get to determine our own destiny. The Legislature should give us that right.

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**WHO'S ON BOARD**

**Regional Transit Tri-Party Agreement resolutions**

**Counties:** Collin, Denton and Tarrant.

**DART member cities and towns :** Addison, Carrollton, Dallas, Farmers Branch, Garland, Highland Park, Irving, Plano, Richardson, Rowlett, University Park.

**The T member cities:** Fort Worth, Richland Hills.

**Denton County Transportation Authority cities:** Denton, Highland Village, Lewisville.

**Non-transit cities:** Allen, Anna, Arlington, Benbrook, Burleson, Cedar Hill, Coppell, DeSoto, Duncanville, Euless, Fairview, Frisco, Grand Prairie, Haltom City, Hurst, Lancaster, McKinney, Melissa, Mesquite, Murphy, North Richland Hills, Watauga.

**Regional organizations:** Regional Transportation Council, Dallas Regional Mobility Coalition (26 cities and five counties), Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition (64 members including 33 cities and four counties), Region 13 Texas Municipal League chapter, Tarrant County Mayors' Council, North Texas Commission.

**Chambers:** Greater Dallas Chamber (position statement), Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Burleson Chamber of Commerce, Southeast Dallas Chamber of Commerce, Northeast Dallas Chamber of Commerce, Metrocrest Chamber of Commerce, Richardson Chamber of Commerce, Lancaster Chamber of Commerce.

**Statewide organizations:** Texas Transit Association, Tex-21

**Pending consideration on a Regional Transit Tri-Party Agreement resolution:**

Dallas County Commissioners Court, Cockrell Hill, Glenn Heights, Southlake, Greater Dallas Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, H-E-B Chamber of Commerce (Hurst-Euless-Bedford).

**Passed a resolution supporting regional transit:**

Cleburne, Colleyville, The Colony, Grapevine.

Source: The T

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**EULESS**

# City bars recreation in its ponds, creeks

By **JESSICA DeLEÓN**  
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

EULESS - Don't go in the water, unless it's a public or private swimming pool.

Swimming, boating or floating in the city's ponds and other waterways has been banned.

Eules has no water-rescue team, Parks and Community Services Director Ray McDonald said.

The closest team is in Grapevine, and it would take several minutes for it to reach

Eules during an emergency.

The City Council approved the ban last week after several boaters were seen on a city pond. No accidents have been reported.

Six years ago, the city had just a few small creeks.

Now it has four ponds — three at The Preserve at McCormick Park and one at Wilshire Park.

"It's a fairly new situation for the city," McDonald said.

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TRANSPORTATION

# Toll road project gets a fast-sounding name

By GORDON DICKSON  
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

One of the biggest road projects in Texas history has a new name: North Tarrant Express.

That's what the collection of proposed express toll lanes — 36 miles in all — on Interstate 35W, Loop 820 and Texas 121/183 in Northeast Tarrant County are being called now.

On Friday, the Texas Department of Transportation will begin accept-

ing bids from companies aiming to build the projects.

Existing lanes will remain free, but the new lanes will require a toll, so motorists willing to pay a premium can bypass congestion. Tolls will be collected electronically, and motorists will be encouraged to open Toll-Tag accounts.

Coinciding with that effort, state officials decided to give the project a catchier name, to help the public un-

**ONLINE**

To view a PDF of the project, go to [www.star-telegram.com](http://www.star-telegram.com)

derstand the purpose of the road construction, which is estimated to cost about \$1.9 billion.

To view the North Tarrant Express plan, go to [www.star-telegram.com](http://www.star-telegram.com).

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## EDITORIALS

### TRANSPORTATION

# Pulling together

■ All of us must unite to attack traffic crisis.

The Fort Worth Star-Telegram and The Dallas Morning News are taking an unprecedented step today by jointly publishing this editorial, verbatim, on the region's transportation crisis.

It was a calculated decision to focus added attention on a pivotal meeting of state lawmakers tomorrow on funding expansion of North Texas' rail transit network.

We want to be clear: A new transit tax for unserved areas is crucial to unsnarling the hideous traffic generated by our population explosion.

Lawmakers also must be clear about what their constituents, local officials and regional planners are saying: Non-transit communities and counties should be able to hold local-option elections to make rail available for their commuters.

Only the Legislature can permit those elections and allow cities to levy up to a penny beyond the current sales tax cap of 8.25 percent. Any legislator who is listening to the public will attend tomorrow's session and pledge to fight for regional transit in next year's lawmaking session.

It's important to recall that we've been here before, at the threshold of a legislative session and expecting the Dallas-Fort Worth delegation to make headway in Austin.

Two years ago, after two regional transit summits (which also were joint efforts by these two newspapers), local leaders gave lawmakers similar marching orders to seek a local-option transit tax. But their efforts fell short in Austin.

Expectations are higher today. A survey taken in eight North Texas counties this year shows more than two-thirds public support for a transit tax in unserved communities. And

#### IN THE KNOW

### Legislative briefing

Texas Sen. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, and Rep. Fred Hill, R-Richardson, have invited all state legislators from the nine-county air quality non-attainment area: Collin, Dallas, Denton, Ellis, Johnson, Kaufman, Parker, Rockwall and Tarrant counties. The briefing is open to the public.

**Time:** 2 p.m. Monday

**Place:** Irving Arts Center, 3333 N. MacArthur Blvd.

#### On the Web

Legislative recommendations at [www.nctcog.org/trans/legislative](http://www.nctcog.org/trans/legislative)

more than 60 cities and business and civic organizations have signed on to a resolution supporting the local-option plan.

We could produce an avalanche of mobility statistics to further support the case for urgency, but we'll offer just a few:

Twenty years ago, North Texans drove an estimated 75 million miles a day. The total has since doubled. In 20 more years, the daily total will exceed 224 million. More than half of our roadways will be classified as congested.

The North Central Texas Council of Governments estimates that by 2025, 53 percent of the projected 8 million residents in the 10 North Texas urban counties will live outside transit service areas.

There is no expectation that road construction can keep up, dooming motorists to waste 40 percent of their driving time in traffic delays.

North Texans are already tired of waiting. Our elected leaders must give us the option to vote on our own solutions.

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## BEDFORD GROUP

# ARTSNET to seek new home, higher profile

STAR-TELEGRAM

A Bedford group that sponsors art exhibits and free concerts is looking for a new home.

ARTSNET has been in Bedford Boys Ranch for 31 years, and the city of Bedford leases the building to the arts group for \$10 a year.

Three full-time employees work at the Boys Ranch office. Art displays and art instruction classes are held at the building.

President Karin Newell, a former Bedford City Council member, said the organization appreciates Bedford's support over the years. But the group could gain a higher profile by moving the administrative office elsewhere, she said.

ARTSNET has requested proposals from member cities throughout Northeast Tarrant County, including Bedford. Interested cities should detail the advantages of being in their communities, Newell said.

Bedford City Manager Beverly Queen said she will discuss the city's response with the City Council.

ARTSNET will take proposals until March 31, Newell said.

— John Kirsch

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## TRANSIT

# Still no accord on rail funding

■ A Dallas legislator says he'll file a bill that would allow the Metroplex to raise sales taxes for commuter rail.

By **GORDON DICKSON**  
STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

IRVING — With less than a month before the state Legislature convenes, North Texas lawmakers still can't agree about how to pay for a regional rail system, and on Monday, opposing sides butted heads over it.

Dallas-Fort Worth transit officials, city and county leaders and some state officeholders support raising the state's sales tax cap by a half-cent to 8.75 cents to build an expanded commuter rail system. But other state officials would rather use other funds, such as motor fuels taxes, or find a way for cities to divert their economic development sales taxes to transit.

During a state Senate review committee meeting Monday in Irving, legislators were under pressure to get something done this session from Metroplex leaders, who have been asking for help to build a rail system for nearly four years.

The lawmakers vowed to somehow get it done.

Phil Ritter, senior vice presi-

dent at Texas Instruments, told committee members that he opposes raising the sales tax cap except for education, arguing that it would burden businesses still adjusting to other new state taxes.

"You need to jealously guard every element of sales tax because we believe, someday, you're going to need it," Ritter said.

His comments drew a harsh response from state Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, chairman of the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security committee.

Carona noted that area elected leaders had been study-

ing regional rail for years, including an intense review of options in recent months.

He asked Ritter: "Where have y'all been the last six months? To hear this presentation now, at this late hour, comes as a surprise and to many a disappointment."

Carona said he will sponsor a bill that would allow a local-option sales tax referendum in the Metroplex.

If voters in Tarrant County and elsewhere approved, the sales tax could be raised to 8.75 percent to pay for rail — with 6.25 percent going to the state and up to 2.5 cents going toward local needs.

"I'm from the school where

I'd rather do something wrong than do nothing," Carona said.

State Rep. Florence Shapiro, R-Plano, said she doesn't support the sales tax and doesn't believe that area transit agencies such as the Fort Worth Transportation Authority, also known as the T, are squeezing all the money they could from fare payers to offset increasing capital costs.

But Shapiro predicted that the North Texas delegation will reach an agreement this session.

She said the next step would be to ask the Legislative Budget Board, a bipartisan research office based in Austin, to provide a detailed financial picture for the operating costs and debt service already experienced by mass transit agencies in the Metroplex.

The idea of regional rail is to connect the area's three transit agencies — the T, Dallas Area

Rapid Transit and the Denton County Transportation Authority — with a network of commuter trains.

The only commuter rail operating in the region is the Trinity Railway Express, which is co-owned by the T and DART.

A second Tarrant County line is planned along the old Cotton Belt route from Fort Worth to Dallas/Fort Worth Airport, and it's expected to be built regardless of funding plans for the rest of the proposed rail system.

A regional system would make it possible to travel between places such as Burleson, Carrollton and Denton by rail.

But getting started is enormously expensive. The estimated cost of such a system has increased to about \$195 million a year.

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JOE E. WATSON | 1922-2006

# Richland Hills' 1st fire chief was a family man as well

■ Joe E. Watson – Papa Joe to family and friends – also fought in World War II and was a successful businessman.

By SCOTT STREATER  
 STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

Joe E. Watson delighted in building things from the ground up.

He wanted to own a business, so he bought a small air conditioner distributing company and built it into a multimillion-dollar enterprise.



WATSON

He wanted to own a lakeside home, so he built one on Eagle Mountain Lake, laying the foundation and doing all the plumbing and masonry work himself.

And after moving to Richland Hills and discovering that the city had no Fire Department, he organized one in 1952, becoming the city's first fire chief.

"He just had a knack about him for getting things started," said Steve Watson, 51, of Weatherford, one of Mr. Watson's sons.

"He'd work all week, and then he'd come home, and he had to have a hammer in his hand building something on the weekends."

Known as Papa Joe to family and friends, Mr. Watson died Sunday at his Richland Hills home of complications from lung cancer. He was 84.

Born Sept. 15, 1922, in Ravia, Okla., Mr. Watson served as a bombardier in the Army Air Corps during World War II, flying numerous missions in a B-17 bomber over Europe.

After the war, he moved to Snyder, about 200 miles west of Fort Worth, and, in, what became a pattern, started an electrical business. In Snyder, he also married Betty Jo Watson.

Mr. Watson's business was next-door to Snyder's volunteer Fire Department, which Mr. Watson joined. That experience helped him when he moved to Richland Hills and helped establish its Fire Department.

"He laid the groundwork for the fire service that we provide today for the city," said Richland Hills Fire Chief David Anderson. The Fire Department is no longer a volunteer unit.

Mr. Watson took his work as fire chief seriously, said Jack Watson, 52, another of Mr. Watson's sons. Jack Watson remembers how, as a child, he was with his father at a grocery store when a fire call came through. Before running off to the scene of the fire, Mr. Watson asked a woman at the store to take Jack and his brother home.

Betty Jo was not pleased when her sons showed up at the front door with a woman she did not know.

"That's the maddest I ever saw my mother get at him," Jack Watson said, laughing. "She kind of scolded my dad about that. Of course, you would never do that today.

## Funeral

11:30 a.m. Wednesday in the Greenwood Chapel at Greenwood Funeral Home, 3100 White Settlement Road in Fort Worth. He will be entombed at the Greenwood Mausoleum. A visitation is set for 6-8 p.m. today at Greenwood Funeral Home.

But it was a different world."

In 1979, Mr. Watson bought Atlantic Air, at the time a small company that provided air conditioning units for manufactured and pre-built homes. By the time the family sold the business, 20 years later, it was worth millions.

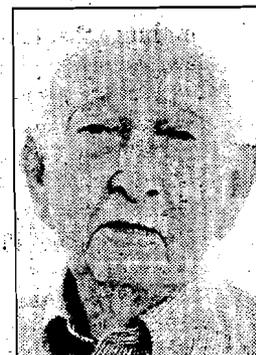
Mr. Watson had several serious health problems over the past two decades, including a major heart attack in 1985 that nearly killed him. He always recovered and remained active. But when Betty Jo Watson died four years ago, shortly after the couple's 50th wedding anniversary, Mr. Watson never got over it, his family says.

"He and my mother had the type of relationship everyone wishes they could have," Jack Watson said.

Mr. Watson also had a very close relationship with his sons.

"The thing we're going to miss the most about our dad is we could call him about anything and say, 'Papa, what would you do?' And he would give you his wisdom," Jack Watson said. "It's going to be hard to lose that."

## Joe E. "Papa Joe" Watson



**WEATHERFORD** — Joe E. "Papa Joe" Watson, 84, a loving father, grandfather, great-grandfather and a mentor to all who knew him, passed away peacefully Sunday, Dec. 10, 2006, at his home after a courageous battle with cancer.

**Funeral:** 11:30 a.m. Wednesday in Greenwood Chapel. Entombment: Greenwood Mausoleum. Visitation: 6 to 8 p.m. Tuesday at Greenwood Funeral Home.

Joe was born Sept. 15, 1922, in Ravia, Okla. He was a World War II Army Air Corps veteran. He was a longtime resident of Richland Hills, where he was a founding member of the fire department and its first fire chief. Joe was a member of IBEW 116 electrical union and served on many boards.

Joe and his wife-partner Betty built many businesses together, including Atlantic Air Inc. in Richland Hills.

Joe was preceded in death by his wife of 50 years, Betty Jo Watson; infant son, Robert; and grandson, Kelly Koons.

**Survivors:** Sons, Joe Watson and wife, Linda, Jack Watson and wife, Becky, and Steve Watson and wife, Lisa; five grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

Greenwood Funeral Home  
 3100 White Settlement Road, 817-336-0584  
 View and sign guestbook at  
[www.star-telegram.com/obituaries](http://www.star-telegram.com/obituaries)

Joe Watson's son, Jack, is a City of Euless Fire Department retiree.

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**TRANSPORTATION**

# Mayor urges I-35W pressure

By **GORDON DICKSON**  
 STAR-TELEGRAM STAFF WRITER

FORT WORTH — Mayor Mike Moncrief on Wednesday asked business owners to keep pressuring the state to expand Interstate 35W, which he called the city's front entrance.

Speaking to the Interstate 35W Coalition, a group of Alliance-area businesses that officially formed a year ago, Moncrief also said that future economic growth in Fort Worth depends on better highways and regional freight and passenger rail systems.

"We know it's a part of how people will perceive our city, our region, as they enter our front door," Moncrief said in a meeting at the Coca-Cola plant on Fossil Creek Boulevard.

Moncrief and other elected officials praised business leaders for pushing the issue of I-35W at the state level. For decades, the freeway, which has only two lanes in each direc-

tion north of 28th Street, was left off the state's lists of funded highway projects.

Then about two years ago,

the 35W Coalition began taking shape, and government and business officials began lobbying for the state to do some-

thing about I-35W.

Last week, the Texas Department of Transportation announced that it was ready to take bids from contractors to build toll lanes on I-35W, Loop 820 and Texas 121/183. Existing lanes would remain free. Construction could begin in 2009, said the agency's Fort Worth engineer, Maribel Chavez.

Moncrief wants work to begin in 2008.

State officials also said that the 36 miles of toll lanes would be considered a single project, under the name North Tarrant Express.

"I appreciate that name," Tarrant County Judge-elect Glen Whitley said at the coalition meeting.

Whitley also credited the formation of the Tarrant Regional Transportation Coalition three years ago to represent the western Metroplex's transportation needs within the North Texas region.

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**IN THE KNOW**

## Transit priorities

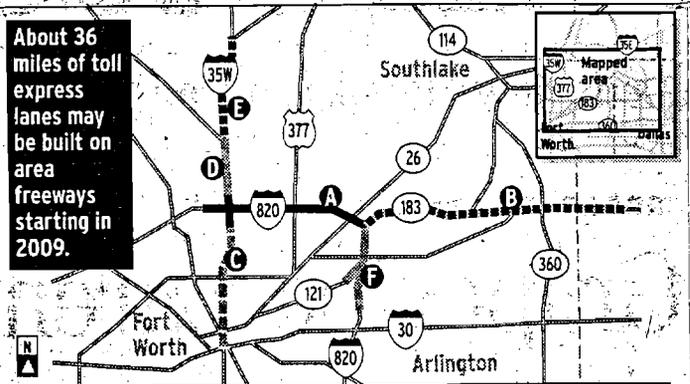
Tarrant County's 2007 transportation priorities:

- Ensure that the state follows through on North Tarrant Express toll lanes.
- Start the environmental study for the local portion of the Trans-Texas Corridor.
- Push for help easing rail traffic at Tower 55 in Fort Worth.
- Push for state funding of a regional rail system.
- Make sure the planned expansion of the Grapevine funnel stays on course.
- Keep as many projects as possible on the region's Transportation Improvement Program, a list of projects scheduled to receive funding over the next two to three years.
- Go to Austin in January with a legislative agenda that promotes Metroplex unity.

SOURCE: County Judge-elect Glen Whitley

## Proposed North Tarrant Express

About 36 miles of toll express lanes may be built on area freeways starting in 2009.



| Roadway                          | Existing lanes | Proposed toll lanes* |
|----------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| A. Northeast Loop 820/I-35W      | 4              | 4                    |
| B. Texas 121/183 Airport Freeway | 6              | 6                    |
| C. I-35W downtown to 820         | 4-6            | 4                    |
| D. I-35W Loop 820 to U.S. 287    | 4              | 4-6                  |
| E. I-35W U.S. 287 to Texas 170   | 4              | 4                    |
| F. East Loop 820/Texas 121       | 4-8            | 2                    |

\*Does not include future nontoll lanes.

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**EATS BEAT**



**Bud  
Kennedy**

■ A tiny new Euless cafe serves homemade gumbo, jambalaya and New Orleans po-boys and pralines. **Pierre's Mardi Gras Cafe** might be the best reason yet to find Texas 10. It's open weekdays for lunch and dinner and Saturdays for lunch at 3260 W. Euless Blvd. near Raider Drive; call 817-283-4999.