

# Toll road discussion sparks dissent

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What began as a routine presentation on toll roads at the monthly Leon Springs Business Association meeting intensified when main speaker Leroy Alloway, spokesman for the Regional Mobility Authority, fielded a question from an opposition spokesman, who was lunching at a table in the audience.

Alloway said that, although he doesn't agree with Terri Hall, founder and director of Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom, he respects her opinion and applauds her involvement, which has raised awareness about the transportation problems the area is facing.

"We're preparing for a future with a 50-percent hike in population in Bexar County by 2030," Alloway said. "And we're doing that in light of the fact that the state legislature hasn't raised the gas tax since 1991."

Hall countered that with a

gas tax in place, San Antonio residents are paying a double tax. In 2003, the Texas

Department of Transportation had the clearance and the gas taxes for improvements to U.S. 281 north of Loop 1604, she stated, adding her group supports easing the clogged roadway by constructing overpasses.

"You're already paying gas tax and now you'll have to pay a toll," Hall said. "They could complete this project in one-tenth of the time for half the price."

The 281 North project will extend 7.9 miles, from Loop 1604 to the county line. The project is expected to be built in under four years, for a guaranteed maximum price of \$328 million.

Alloway said the RMA



Photo by Joni Simon

Leroy Alloway of the Regional Mobility Authority fields a question during a Leon Springs Business Association luncheon meeting.

wants to ensure that everyone always has a choice. Under state law, motorists have the option to pay the toll or ride free in the outer lanes, which are to be built first.

Hall, however, sees that option as a class statement.

"If you can't afford the toll, you'll be a second class citizen using the frontage roads," she said.

Road construction and toll roads aren't just controversial locally.

Alloway said that when the 2009 Legislature convenes, transportation promises to be a hot topic and a pivotal issue.

"If you followed the session last time and you think water was a controversial issue for San Antonio, transportation is going to be just as big," he said.

One of the goals of RMA, Alloway said, is to keep the economy moving.

"For far too long if you wanted a project done on a highway in San Antonio, you would have to drive up to

Austin and get down on your hands and knees and beg TxDOT to send funding this way," he said. "We want to change that."

Alloway said RMA wants to accelerate local projects.

"The pay-as-you-go system, which we have historically used in this state, which we have historically used in the nation, cannot keep up with the growth and demands that we have as a community," Alloway said.

"Let me ask this question. Can any of you remember a time in the last 20 years when 410 wasn't under construction? That's an example of pay-as-you-go. Save a little bit of money, build a little bit of road. Save a lot more money, especially in today's global economy, build even less road. Prices have gone up. That's no surprise to anyone. We're seeing it in every walk of life right now."

Hurricanes Ike and Gustav have made funding even less available, Alloway said.