

# Star-Telegram

## In Hurst, congressmen tout drilling to help fund roads

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HURST -- The expansion of domestic oil and gas drilling could generate the money needed to fix the nation's crumbling roads and bridges and build new ones to cope with growth, members of Congress say.

The idea would be to lift a ban on offshore drilling, allow exploration in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and promote additional shale drilling. Lease payments for these drilling rights would then help provide billions of dollars in new highway, transit and other mobility projects across the U.S. -- providing elected leaders with an alternative to raising motor fuel taxes.

"It makes a linkage between gas production and a method to pay for infrastructure improvements," Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Lewisville, said after explaining the proposal to constituents during a transportation summit Monday in Hurst.

Rep. John Mica, R-Fla., speaking in a videotaped message to summit attendees at the Hurst Conference Center, expressed optimism that the measure could be passed in the House before year's end. Current highway funding expires in March.

Mica, chairman of the House Transportation Committee, has been a vocal critic of Congress' habit of authorizing more highway and transit projects than tax revenue can cover, a practice that has depleted the highway trust fund.

However, the proposal -- known as the American Energy and Infrastructure Jobs Act -- has drawn criticism. Some Democrats have pointed out the danger of linking the fate of a long-term transportation bill with a controversial subject such as expanded drilling, which some groups in Washington oppose on environmental grounds. In the Senate, a different transportation bill would provide two years' worth of projects nationwide, primarily using existing funding sources.

Monday's meeting was at the ninth annual gathering of local, state and federal transportation officials in Burgess' 26th Congressional District.

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