

Dallas Morning News

Editorial: Following Carona in Senate Transportation

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Sen. [Tommy Williams](#) of southeast Texas has a near-impossible act to follow, at least from a Dallas-[Fort Worth](#) perspective.

Leaders in the North Texas metro area were stunned last week at news that Williams is replacing Dallas' [John Carona](#) as chairman of the Senate's transportation committee. Carona has been a warrior for new money for road and rail projects, and Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst's decision to reassign him to a new chairmanship appeared to signal the worst – that the transportation fight is over in Austin and has ended in defeat.

Dewhurst says that's not the case. Carona says it is.

North Texas now needs to hear directly from Williams, and here's our advice to him.

Keep the date Carona had set for an Aug. 3 committee meeting in [Plano](#). Come to Dallas-Fort Worth and look at the list of badly needed road and bridge projects backing up like cars on Stemmons Freeway. Tell local transportation officials how you intend to find ways to pay for them. Give leaders details on which revenue ideas you'll get behind and which are non-starters.

Then adjourn the meeting at the afternoon rush hour and see how long it takes to get out of town on our highways. Be sure to drive through downtown Dallas. That could be the convincer that we have a traffic congestion problem that needs Austin's help.

Carona had put down his marker for the 2011 session – a 10-cent increase in the state's motor-fuels tax. He went to the mat in the last Legislature, unsuccessfully, for a bill to give urban areas the right to vote on new taxes or fees to battle traffic congestion.

Dewhurst's switch in transportation committee chairs indicates that Carona has come on too strong and hacked off too many people – especially fellow [Republicans](#) who wanted a quieter sell on the sensitive issue of taxes.

Actually, there is no way to pussyfoot around on taxes. Carona's clamor produced clarity about where people stood.

Now Williams, it appears, would have to find a different route – if one can be found in a session that will be dominated by tough budget questions.

The incoming chair does have advantages in tackling the transportation job. He is a Republican from a wide swath of urbanized Texas, from suburban Houston east to Beaumont, so he knows what traffic jams look like. He once served on the transportation

committee, and he is an accountant, which ought to help him rebut the deniers who say there's really enough money floating around to build the roads Texas needs.

As for the softer sell on transportation that many Austin politicians might prefer, Williams can use charm, facts, logic, persuasion, flattery, horse-trading – whatever works and whatever people may like better than Carona's blunt-force politics.

But Williams can't let the deniers hold sway, and he can't pussyfoot around.