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City could get county assistance with road costs

By Nicholas Sakelaris
News-Mirror Writer

Tarrant County voters will decide in May whether to raise the county property tax rate to pay for city roads and highways, including as much as \$12.8 million worth of work in Mansfield.

All eight of the roadway projects Mansfield submitted will likely be part of Tarrant County's proposed \$200 million transportation bond package going before voters May 15, said Jon Weist, Precinct 2 administrator.

If the bond package passes, Tarrant County would chip in half the cost of the project with the city paying the rest. Highway projects could also receive state and federal funding.

Tarrant County cities submitted 113 road projects and 18 highway projects for consideration in the bond program last year. Tarrant County Commissioners are scheduled to confirm which projects will officially be on the ballot by March 7.

Mansfield's five street projects ranked within the top 37, well within the \$100 million limit commissioners have set aside to pay for city streets. Mansfield's three highway projects also fell within the \$40 million limit set on highway projects.

"They shouldn't have anything to worry about," said Weist, referring to whether Mansfield's projects would be on the ballot.

Transportation is only one part of the \$440 million bond package commissioners have proposed for the election.

Other items include a new jail, a new civil courts building and expansions for the Medical Examiner's Office and juvenile services.

If approved, the 20- to 25-year bond package would peak in 2012 and decrease from there, said Debbie Schneider, director of budget and risk management for Tarrant County. The property tax rate could go up 1.45 cents per \$100 of assessed property value in 2012, which would translate to a \$21.75 increase on a \$150,000 home that year, Schneider said.

This is the first time Tarrant County has considered helping cities with their transportation needs, Weist said. Denton, Dallas and Collin counties have all had similar elections.

"The county feels like we're in a position where there is a need and we are going to help," Weist said. "The need for transportation is greater than their ability to pay for it."

Chris Burkett, Mansfield assistant city manager, said that Mansfield's taxpayers would get a "direct benefit" by spreading the cost over all of Tarrant County.

"We feel very comfortable that we'll be able to get some projects in Mansfield," Burkett said.

The Mansfield City Council voted last year to submit the following road projects:

- Widening East Broad Street to a four-lane divided roadway with curbs and gutters from Holland Road to Day Miar Road. Requested county funding – \$1.73 million

- Widening Debbie Lane to a four-lane divided roadway from Matlock Road to the eastern city limit. Requested county funding – \$2.37 million.

- Building Heritage Parkway as a four-lane road from the Union Pacific railroad to the future extension of Matlock Road. Requested county funding – \$2.81 million.

- Widening West Broad Street to a four-lane road from Cotton Drive to Retta Road. Requested county funding – \$1.14 million

- Widening Calender Road to a four-lane road with curbs and gutters from U.S. 287 to Turner Warnell Road. Requested county funding – \$1.02 million

- Building U.S. 287 frontage roads connecting Walnut Creek Drive to East Broad Street. Requested county funding – \$1.72 million

- Building Texas turnarounds on U.S. 287 at Walnut Creek Drive. Requested county funding – \$2.19 million

- Building Texas turnarounds on U.S. 287 at East Broad Street. Requested county funding – \$931,000

Mansfield also submitted a \$3.7 million request for help building trails on the Walnut Creek Linear Park project from Matlock Road to Joe Pool Lake, but the item isn't likely to make it onto the ballot, Weist said.