

The Herald-Zeitung

Area residents weigh in on TxDOT's future

By Mitzie Stelte

Published July 19, 2008

AUSTIN — Some New Braunfels area residents toughed out the 12-hour long Sunset Advisory Commission hearing Tuesday in Austin reviewing the practices of the Texas Department of Transportation.

The commission characterized TxDOT as agenda-driven and untrustworthy, and lawmakers raised the possibility of making the state transportation commissioner an elected position rather than governor-appointed.

Democratic candidate for Dist. 73 State Representative Daniel Boone was one of the members of the public who addressed the committee.

Boone recommended the commission be comprised of regional representatives with trained engineers as part of the membership. Boone also said the TxDOT chairman should be elected.

"TxDOT is too important to the people of Texas to be led by political appointees," said Boone.

Boone's rival, Republican Doug Miller, said Wednesday he didn't know enough about the issue to comment, but that he planned to meet with members of the Sunset Commission soon and would discuss it.

The Commission periodically reviews government agencies to determine whether they should continue to exist and makes recommendations for improvements.

Terri Hall, founder and director of Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom based in San Antonio, also spoke at the hearing.

"We have been very adamant that it should be a single, elected commissioner," she said.

TxDOT spokesman Chris Lippincott said Wednesday the agency doesn't have an opinion on the issue and would support whatever lawmakers decide.

Hall said she brought documents for the committee that prove TxDOT has violated public trust.

Seven members of the Citizens' Alliance for Smart Expansion spoke out at the hearing against the proposed New Braunfels Outer Loop, according to Sharon Levett, founder

and director.

"We needed to go to them because we haven't been heard by TxDOT," she said.

CASE was originally started as a group of citizens concerned about the Outer Loop, but the focus has expanded to all growth issues in New Braunfels and surrounding areas.

Levett said there were many other people at the hearing who also expressed concern that TxDOT was advocating construction and not willing to listen.

She said the Sunset Commission was interested and asked for documents regarding the Outer Loop.

Hall said other issues discussed at the hearing included public versus private partnerships of highways and whether U.S. 281 will become a toll road.

Proposed changes for the department will be considered by the Texas Legislature when it meets in 2009.

Copyright © 2008 The Herald-Zeitung