

House pushes back at TxDOT

By [Ben Wear](#) | Wednesday, March 4, 2009, 01:37 PM

The House today considered, but ultimately did not act on, a five-page resolution chastising the Texas Department of Transportation for a “rush to judgment” on how to spend \$1.7 billion in federal stimulus funds.

The resolution, HR 709, was sponsored by state Rep. Garnet Coleman, D-Houston. But the co-sponsors included state Rep. Jim Dunnam, D-Waco, who is heading a select committee on the stimulus plan and has been critical of TxDOT’s handling of the stimulus disbursement for about a week now. Joining in as well was state Rep. Joe Pickett, D-El Paso, who chairs the House Transportation Committee and several days ago was defending the process that had produced the list of projects TxDOT wants to build using the federal money.

Pickett said later that the resolution, and the discussion of it before it was pulled down without a vote, gave members a chance to express their unhappiness in cases where their area was shut out on road expansion.

“We need to go forward,” Pickett said. “If we weren’t in session, it wouldn’t be an issue.”

The resolution concluded with the statement that “the failure of the commission and the department to conduct the people’s business in a fair, open, and accountable manner has lost them the confidence of the House and of the people of Texas.” That language was reportedly so strong that it made some House members uncomfortable with voting for the resolution, a factor in the decision to pull it down.

The Texas Transportation Commission, which released a tentative list of 21 projects last week, is scheduled to vote on the \$1.2 billion list Thursday. The list, which includes \$115 million for four flyover bridges at the west end of the proposed U.S. 290 tollway, is said to be still undergoing tinkering as the vote approaches.

Waco officials in particular have been unhappy that it doesn’t include expansion of Interstate 35 from four lanes to six in a stretch from Waco to West. However, the list does include \$121 million (roughly 10 percent of the total package) to expand I-35 from Salado to Belton. That portion of I-35 is within the TxDOT district headquartered in Waco.