

SUBJECT: Allowing an additional fee on vehicle registration for some counties

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 12 ayes — Canales, E. Thompson, Ashby, Bucy, Davis, Harris, Lozano, Martinez, Ortega, Perez, Rogers, Smithee

0 nays

1 absent — Landgraf

WITNESSES: For — Steve Aldrich, Brazos County; Nancy Berry, County Commissioner; Dennis Christiansen, Vice Chair Brazos County Regional Mobility Authority; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jennifer Rodriguez, City of College Station; Jamaal Smith, City of Houston, Office of the Mayor; Ray Sullivan, HNTB; Tedi Ellison, Regional Mobility Authority; Tracey Borders, The Associated General Contractors of Texas-Highway, Heavy, Utilities and Industrial Branch)

Against — Terri Hall, Texas TURF, Texans for Toll-free Highways; Don Dixon; (*Registered, but did not testify*: Matt Long, Fredericksburg Tea Party of Texas)

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Roland Luna and Clint Thompson, Texas Department of Motor Vehicles)

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code sec. 502.402 allows the commissioners court of certain counties to impose an additional fee for a vehicle registration of no more than \$10. The provision applies to:

- a county that borders Mexico and has a population of more than 250,000; and
- a county that has a population of more than 1.5 million and is coterminous with a regional mobility authority.

Of these counties, a county with a population of less than 700,000 may

increase the additional fee up to \$20 dollars upon voter approval.

Revenue from such fees must be sent to the applicable regional mobility authority to fund long-term transportation projects for the county.

DIGEST:

CSHB 1698 would allow any county with a regional mobility authority to impose an additional vehicle registration fee of no more than \$10. In such counties without existing authority to impose the fee, it would have to be approved by the majority of voters in the county in a referendum election.

A county that bordered Mexico and had a population of more than 250,000 no longer would be required to have a population of less than 700,000 in order to increase an additional vehicle registration fee to \$20 by voter approval. Such a county that did not require a vehicle emissions inspection would have to send 50 percent of the additional revenue collected due to the fee increase to the county treasurer to be credited to the county road and bridge fund.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2021.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSHB 1698 would ensure that the voters of any county with a regional mobility authority (RMA) were able to provide a new source of funding to enhance the RMA's ability to effectively plan and execute projects to improve mobility and address existing problems. In particular, the bill would allow Brazos County and Bryan-College Station to obtain more funds to combat drastically increased traffic congestion, which costs city residents in the region more than \$100 million annually, and which residents have identified as a top city services priority.

The bill would not create a fee or increase an existing one, but would simply allow county voters the choice to provide more funding to their RMA. CSHB 1698 would enhance the local flexibility that is needed because the transportation needs of different areas of the state vary widely.

CRITICS
SAY:

CSHB 1698 would allow a fee that would disproportionately impact low-income individuals who already struggle to pay the regular vehicle registration fee.

OTHER
CRITICS
SAY:

Transportation issues should be handled at the state, not local level, in order to provide uniformity and ensure an equitable distribution of resources.