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Atlanta: Senate adopts Mullis' road-funding plan

By: Jake Armstrong

ATLANTA — The state Senate on Monday scrapped a 1 percent statewide sales tax proposal to fund transportation projects in favor of a county-by-county tax supporters say will prevent projects from improperly falling prey to politics.

The move revives Chickamauga Republican Sen. Jeff Mullis' proposal to allow local governments to go it alone or band together. Working jointly, they could fund projects from paving rural roads in Northwest Georgia to building a maglev train linking Chattanooga and Atlanta. The tax could raise up to \$1.2 billion a year for the state and \$850 million for metro Atlanta.

The Senate move eliminates the plan hatched in the House and carried by Transportation Committee Chairman Vance Smith to create a statewide tax and fund projects from a priority list. Some have questioned how that list was created.

“The Senate’s position is all about local control. There is no list of projects, there is nothing lost for political payoff,” said Sen. Mullis, chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee.

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported Sunday that the House project list mysteriously raised the priority of two road projects the Georgia Department of Transportation had deemed nonessential. One is a \$26 million widening project in Greene County next to a Lake Oconee resort owned by a donor to Georgia Republicans; the other is an interchange on Interstate 95 in Bryan County that would benefit a mixed-use development proposed by a GOP donor, the newspaper reported.

House lawmakers now must agree to the Senate’s plan or possibly end the session for the second consecutive year without a dedicated source of funding to relieve the state’s transportation woes.

Last year, a 1 percent local sales tax proposal Sen. Mullis shepherded came three votes short of passage in the final minutes of the legislative session.

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