



SEARCH



PRODUCED BY



[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Weather](#) | [Traffic](#) | [Features](#) | [Entertainment](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [WBRZ-TV](#) | [The Advocate](#) | [Obituaries](#)

Mar 1, 2006

Click to subscribe to Business Today.

Most Emailed

- [Investigation sought in shooting death](#)
- [Study says medical malpractice crisis is over](#)
- [Councilman rescues family from fire](#)
- [Muddy Mamou gumbo route](#)
- [Post-hurricane population figures vary](#)

Hot Topics



[Population shifts in Louisiana](#)

[2006 New Car Preview](#)

More Hot Topics

Advocate Info

- [Subscribe](#)
- [Posters](#)
- [Reprints](#)
- [Advertising](#)
- [Opinions](#)
- [Archives](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Employment](#)
- [Contact Info](#)

Louisiana

Headlines

- [FHA agrees to cover cost of building a taller Biloxi Bay bridge](#)
- [Hurricane-battered Miss. coast celebrates Mardi Gras](#)
- [As expected, Nagin officially qualifies for re-election](#)
- [Federal judge scheduled to hear NJ lawsuit against ports deal](#)
- [Lake Charles area pontoon bridge closed after wreck](#)

National

Headlines

- [Bush confident bin Laden will be captured](#)
- [At least 30 killed in new Iraq violence](#)
- [Saddam asks judges: 'Where is the crime?'](#)

- [Bush arrives in India seeking nuclear deal](#)
- [Senate advances Patriot Act renewal](#)

Ascension president pitches broader road tax

By **DAVID J. MITCHELL**

River parishes bureau

Published: Mar 1, 2006

Ascension Parish President Ronnie Hughes, in proposing a half-cent parishwide sales tax for roads, is taking on two longstanding issues around which previous leaders have treaded carefully.

The two central issues of Hughes' Ascension 2010 concept, laid out in his Feb. 20 State of the Parish address, are: spending parish money to improve state highways and including the municipalities, not just the unincorporated areas, in a parish road tax.

Spending local money on state highways has been a thorny issue in past years, with leaders and residents reasoning the highways are the state's problem. With state money in short supply, that may no longer be an option. Meanwhile, levying a parish tax within the Gonzales, Sorrento and Donaldsonville municipal limits requires an extra level of negotiation and public input.

"The sales tax is going to be a pill," Jerry Chauvin, 48, owner of a Donaldsonville office supply business, told Hughes on Thursday in his first community meeting after the speech.

Some local municipal leaders and the Baton Rouge Area Chamber are taking a wait-and-see stance on the proposal.

Parish Council response has been muted so far; only four of the 11 members even showed up for Hughes' speech.

The biggest selling point may be traffic congestion.

During the past three years, combined traffic volumes on La. 42, La. 73, La. 431 and La. 74 have increased by 12 percent annually, Hughes reported during his speech.

When dealing with infrastructure, sticking strictly to political jurisdictions doesn't make sense, he said. "No sane citizen thinks that way. I don't think that way."

Hughes said that Worthey Road, which runs through Gonzales and past the parish courthouse, is a city, parish and state highway over its 3.3-mile length.

"Now if you did a poll in the parish, how many people would know that?" Hughes asked.

The parish's road tax — two-thirds of a one-half-cent sales tax — generated \$45 million in the past 10 years. Hughes said that won't make a dent in the \$700 million in unmet transportation needs during the next 20 years. Those road needs dwarf the parish's overall budget of about \$61 million this year.

The new sales tax would be part of a multi-pronged approach that includes a development-impact fee for road improvements linked to new growth and for design costs and right-of-way purchases, parish officials have said.

The impact fee, which needs council approval only and legally can't be used for road needs generated by past growth, is projected to generate \$100 million in a 20-year period, estimates show.

The proposed sales tax would generate about \$8.5 million at 2006 levels and would pull in \$286.2 million in 20 years, estimates from Public Works Director Bill Roux show. Roux also has discussed using the sales tax to bond debt, but Hughes hasn't settled on the timeframe or gotten into the plan's financing specifics.

The 2010 plan also banks on receiving \$250 million from the state and federal governments by 2026. Hughes said that's more likely to happen with a local match available through the tax and the impact fee.

Hughes plans to tie the tax to specific road projects and give it a certain ending date. The Republican parish president acknowledged that public trust in parish government being able to spend the money wisely is an issue and said the plan's specificity is the best way to build in accountability.

"I will not support taxation without it," he said.

Hughes has put forward the \$500,000 parish transportation study, which, he said, is a well-thought-out starting point. He said he plans to meet with area officials before creating a citizens committee in March to hash out the final list. Among the projects in the study is a long-discussed East Ascension loop.

Stephen Moret, Baton Rouge Area Chamber president and chief executive officer, said Hughes' proposal shows strong leadership and does a nice job of laying out the major issues.

Moret, who attended Hughes' State of the Parish address in the parish's Gonzales courthouse, said the chamber needs to study Hughes' plan before deciding whether to back it.

In interviews last week, two Ascension Parish mayors withheld support until they saw more and could tell whether the plan would benefit their municipalities.

"We wouldn't pass it if it didn't. That'd be foolish," Sorrento Mayor Brenda Melancon said.

The tax would put all of Ascension Parish's sales tax rates at 9 percent, when state and local taxes are counted. That's on a par with almost all of East Baton Rouge Parish, except for Baker, which is at 9.5 percent. Ascension Parish's new rate would be equal to as much as a full percentage point higher than or a full percentage point lower than sales tax rates in Livingston Parish's municipalities and unincorporated areas, depending on the location. Denham Springs' is 9.5 percent.

Time will tell if parish leaders and voters sign on with Hughes.

"If it's a good overall plan," Gonzales Mayor Johnny Berthelot said, "I think the people of the parish have been waiting long enough to see a good comprehensive plan that affects everybody's quality of life. ... He might have chance to pass it, so we'll have to wait and see it."





Advertisements

Ads by Goooooogle

**Document
Retrieval**

Document
Retrieval of
Louisiana S. LA
parish legal
documents
ladocuments.com

Tax Sales

Free Search For
Tax sales and
Property
Government
Auctions
StateAuctions.org

Sales Tax Rates

Databases
Purchase Sales
Tax Rates
Databases.
Accurate,
Affordable Data
from \$99
www.taxdatasystems.com

**Do Good and Do
your 1040**

Online Tax Prep
powered by CCH
Educate, Enlighten
and Help people
www.supportwith1040.com

Copyright © 1992-2006, 2theadvocate.com, WBRZ, Louisiana Broadcasting LLC and The Advocate,
Capital City Press LLC, All Rights Reserved. [Click here to send comments or questions about
2theadvocate.com.](#)