

Public works chief proposes lone impact-fee district

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Published: Apr 13, 2006

**GONZALES** — The Ascension Parish director of public works has unveiled a new wrinkle in the parish government's proposed development impact fees for roads.

The plan calls for using the fees to pay for corridor preservation and preliminary design work for new roads and capacity expansion that would be constructed with revenue from a proposed parishwide one-half-cent sales tax and matching grants.

Many of those roads are state and federal highways.

Director Bill Roux on Tuesday night also called for the parish to have one impact-fee district. The Parish Council has proposed three on the advice of consultants.

While Roux and Parish President Ronnie Hughes have said before that impact fees should be used for the purposes outlined Tuesday, the difference is the specificity.

The fee program has been presented as dealing with new growth demands without much said about which roads would be funded.

As proposed, the fees would be charged for new development at the time a building permit is pulled. Experts and builders say the costs would be passed on to homebuyers and other end-users of new construction. The plan is expected to generate \$2.5 million annually.

The fee plan is being revised after concerns from council members, residents and builders about costs and the impact on economic development. The proposed adjustment may deal with concerns about how the fees would be spent.

Councilwoman Cheryl Fontenot, chairwoman of the council Transportation Committee that received Roux's presentation Tuesday, said that worry in arguing fees should be put to a public vote.

"We can say this is what we're going to do. People don't trust us. They really don't trust us. I don't trust us," she said. "That's really the truth of the matter."

Roux's plan ties impact fees to the sales tax road plan, but avoids a public vote on the impact fees. A super-majority of the council would be required to approve the fees.

Instead, like the successful Baton Rouge Green Light Plan that voters passed last year, the final Ascension Parish sales tax plan and the specific roads it would fund would be put on the ballot in the fall. The impact fees would fund primarily the nonconstruction phases of the same road projects.

Some on the council committee appeared receptive but questioned the plan's legality and asked for

opinions from parish consultants.

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