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**Sam Olens questions traffic tax**  
**Jon Gillooly - Staff Writer**

MARIETTA - Cobb County Board of Commissioners Chairman Sam Olens has concerns about a proposal announced by Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle that would allow individual counties or groups of counties to seek voter approval for a special transportation tax.

"I have significant concerns about the bill," said Olens.

Cagle said the TSPLOST Resolution, as he calls it, would amend the Georgia Constitution so that as of May 1, 2009, individual counties can propose to their citizens a 1-cent sales tax to pay for transportation projects. Similar to previous SPLOSTs, each proposal would be required to list the projects the TSPLOST will pay for, the cost of those projects, and the length of time the tax would be in effect.

Eighty percent of revenue collected through the TSPLOST would be returned to the participating county for projects. Ten percent will be used by the state for mass transit and the remaining 10 percent would be spent as the state directed, Cagle said.

"Having the state allocate 20 percent of the county's funds elsewhere in the state is a non-starter," Olens said.

Although he doesn't disagree that traffic is choking the metro area.

"The problem is regional; the monies must stay in the region," Olens said.

On Friday, Cagle said he would be open to any ideas Olens had to offer, even reconsidering the state's 20 percent cut.

However, Cobb stands to gain from mass-transit options in the proposal, Cagle said.

Olens said he prefers a plan supported by House Speaker Glenn Richardson.

Clelia Davis, a spokeswoman for Richardson, said the Speaker's proposal calls for a statewide one-cent sales tax. Voters across Georgia would have to approve it, she said, and 90 percent of the money would go back to the region where it was collected.

"We don't need another SPLOST for local roads," Olens said. "The voters should choose if we need a SPLOST to solve the major transportation problems of this region."

Fred Bentley, Jr., former president of the Cobb Chamber of Commerce, said he believes Cobb residents would support a transportation SPLOST if certain issues were addressed.

"It is critical that the plan must be directed toward a major regional public transportation initiative ... to gain community confidence," Bentley said.

"If these issues are addressed, then I am confident that people will support such an effort."

Marietta City Councilwoman Holly Walquist would support letting voters decide such a measure as well.

"We can't afford to wait for money trees to start growing in Georgia to address" traffic congestion, Ms. Walquist said.

Cagle's resolution gives the General Assembly a deadline of April 1 to establish a framework by which counties can voluntarily join together into regions and combine their tax for projects of regional significance.

Sen. Judson Hill (R-east Cobb) supports the regional transportation SPLOST. A statewide tax, he said, would continue to pit metro Atlanta - the "economic engine of the state" - against rural Georgia.

David Chastain of Acworth, a logistics analyst for Lockheed Martin who is active in Libertarian circles, opposes Cagle's resolution.

"Right now we have County Commission SPLOST, Cobb County Education SPLOST, and other embedded taxes. Where do we say 'enough is enough?'" Chastain asked.

Cagle said he supports the measure because it gives voters a choice, rather than making it mandatory. If a county doesn't want the tax, all they have to do is vote it down.

In the House, state Rep. Sharon Cooper (R-east Cobb) said she would prefer a regional SPLOST.

"A SPLOST tailored to the specific needs of an area is more efficient and much more likely to win the approval of the voters," Rep. Cooper said.

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