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State Rep.: Cobb Has Lacked Leadership in TSPLOST

During a town hall meeting Monday, David Wilkerson noted the switch by officials earlier this year in support from transit to reversible toll lanes.

By [Michael Stone](#) | [Email the author](#) | March 13, 2012

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As metro Atlanta voters continue to weigh how they will vote on [the upcoming transportation referendum](#), state Rep. David Wilkerson said Cobb has had a “lack of leadership” prior to the July vote.

“I like (Cobb Commission Chairman) Tim Lee, but I think he’s done a disservice to this county by saying I support the list. I kind of support it. Then [he came down to the capitol](#) and said we need to change it,” said Wilkerson, a Democrat whose District 33 covers portions of Austell, Mableton, Powder Springs and Smyrna, and has a population of about 55,000.

Wilkerson was referring to Lee calling for a change by the state Legislature in [the TSPLOST list](#) after it had been finalized in October by [the Atlanta Regional Roundtable](#), a 21-member group of metro mayors and county commission chairs.

The chairman [changed his support in January](#) from TSPLOST transit projects in Cobb to reversible toll lanes along Interstates 75 and 575. The reason for the switch was the state Department of Transportation pulling the project in December.

Gov. Nathan Deal had objected because the project [would have been privately financed](#), putting those roads in private control for 60 or 70 years, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* said.

But then in February, Deal proposed gas tax revenue be used to avoid the private financing, [the Marietta Daily Journal reported](#). With that move, Lee backed off his call to the legislature and said Cobb’s \$689 million earmark will still go to transit such as light rail or buses, the newspaper said.

During Monday evening’s town hall meeting at the [Ron Anderson Recreation Center](#) before 18 people, Wilkerson noted the Republican state legislators—Sens. Chip Rogers and Lindsey Tippins, and State Rep. Earl Earhart—[who also offered their support in Lee’s proposed switch](#).

“So (Lee) is feeling pressure and I understand the pressure he’s feeling,” Wilkerson said. “But you have to make decisions when you lead.”

Kennesaw Mayor Mark Mathews, the other official from Cobb in the roundtable, also supported the switch.

With the original finalized list standing, voters across the 10-county metro area will head to the polls July 31 on whether to raise their sales tax by 1 percent over 10 years to fund the proposed \$8.5 billion in transportation projects.

“You have this list out there that people either like, hate, no one loves it, but it’s a regional solution,” Wilkerson said.

Wilkerson, one of 63 Democrats in the 180-member Georgia House, said that some Republicans who helped create the list are “running in the other direction” so that it appears like Democrats are raising taxes.

Near the start of the meeting, he asked the crowd what they thought the Georgia Legislature is currently tackling. Jobs was the primary response.

“These bills I’m going to talk about have nothing to do with jobs or transportation,” he said.

Wilkerson mentioned the efforts to allow hunters to put silencers on their rifles, allow those 18-21 to carry concealed weapons, and recent social issues.

Wilkerson said the Democrats and Republicans in the Legislature have some “philosophical differences” and that Republicans are being “forced to do some thing that they’re not even comfortable with.”

Also at the meeting, the state representative mentioned some of the odds and ends he helps constituents with and suggested that those running into problems or who have questions [contact him](#).

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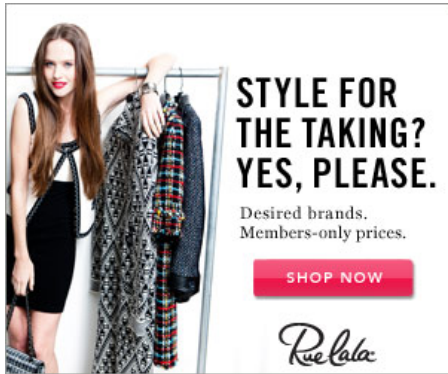
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