

# Transit funding bill negates DuPage County referendum

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DuPage County's quarter-cent sales tax increase referendum that will confront voters on the Feb. 5 ballot has been made a non-issue by the General Assembly's passage of the Chicago-area mass transit funding package.

But, it's too late to have the referendum question removed from the ballot - and in point of fact those who voted early this week have already cast judgment on it.

But with the transit bill providing a half-cent sales tax increase in the collar counties, the new funding mechanism sought by DuPage County to negate the steep budget cuts it had planned in the area of public safety now can be avoided. In the transit bill, half of the half-cent sales hike can be used by the counties for public safety purposes.

So, DuPage County officials who had been gearing up to try to sell their quarter-cent referendum to the public now are switching directions and telling people to vote against it.

We concur with that recommendation.

"The bottom line is we don't seek another quarter-cent (tax) and we won't accept it," said County Board Chairman Bob Schillerstrom.

It's good to hear that, on the very slim chance voters go ahead and approve the quarter-cent sales tax hike anyway, the County Board chairman is saying that the county won't implement it.

As for the mass transit bill itself, it certainly isn't perfect but it should serve to keep the trains and buses running.

Left unfunded, though, are up to \$10 billion in track and equipment repairs for the aging system, an issue that still needs to be dealt with by the Legislature sooner rather than later.

And some legislators are still rankled by Gov. Rod Blagojevich's last-minute insertion of free transit for senior citizens, and some still talk about trying to amend that at some point, but that little bit of political hardball on the governor's part is the price paid for getting him to abandon his pledge not to raise the state sales tax.

In the end, letting seniors ride free is obviously less devastating to the Chicago area, including Naperville, than it would be for the General Assembly not to have passed anything and let the transit system be crucified by service cuts and large fare hikes.

One of these days politicians in both parties have to start thinking about what is best for the state as opposed to what is best for them. As usual, that didn't happen.