

WIRE

Corpus Christi's water problem may point to bigger solution | Opinion

Danny Tyler, Opinion contributor

Sep 29, 2026

Corpus Christi has spent years looking for more water.

That search reached another milestone this month when the proposed Harbor Island seawater desalination project received its final required discharge permit. The permitted plant could eventually produce as much as 100 million gallons of potable water a day.

That is an enormous amount of water. But perhaps the most interesting part of the project isn't the desalination plant.

It is what happens to the water after the plant makes it.

I came to this question from the other side of Texas.

Living in West Texas, I began wondering why seawater from the Gulf couldn't simply be desalinated and piped west. On a map, the idea looks almost obvious: There is an enormous supply of seawater on one side of the state and growing demand hundreds of miles away.

Then I started thinking about what would actually be required.

Water is heavy. West Texas sits thousands of feet above sea level. Moving tremendous volumes of water that far would require pipelines, pumping stations and enormous amounts of energy. Then there are rights-of-way, storage, treatment, environmental considerations and cost.

My simple pipeline began looking considerably less simple.

But that led me to a different question.

Instead of asking how to build one enormous pipeline from one water source to one destination, should Texas be thinking about how its future water projects can eventually connect?

Interestingly, the state has already begun moving in that direction.

Senate Bill 7, passed by the Texas Legislature in 2025, directs the Texas Water Development Board to develop guidance and standards intended to make different water-conveyance systems potentially interconnected and interoperable.

The law also calls for considering excess capacity in new conveyance infrastructure, where practical, so additional water supplies developed in the future could use infrastructure built today.

That deserves more attention.

Corpus Christi demonstrates why.

The Coastal Bend isn't depending upon a single answer. Its water future involves existing reservoirs and long-distance pipelines as well as potential groundwater, reuse and seawater desalination. Each source has different economics, limitations and advantages.

Texas as a whole faces the same problem on a much larger scale.

Some areas have seawater nearby. Others have brackish groundwater. Some communities can expand reuse. Reservoirs and aquifers provide different forms of storage. Conservation can stretch existing supplies.

These resources do not have to be interchangeable to be complementary.

None of this means water can be moved around Texas as easily as electricity moves across the power grid. It cannot.

Water has chemistry. It has elevation. It requires enormous physical infrastructure to move. Water rights, river basins and environmental needs matter. A statewide water network would be far more complicated than connecting pipes on a map.

But there is still a useful lesson in the electric grid.

Texas does not require every power plant to generate electricity the same way. Different sources contribute to a network built around common technical standards.

Perhaps our future water infrastructure should incorporate some of the same thinking.

A desalination project built on the coast doesn't have to solve West Texas' water problem. A West Texas groundwater project doesn't have to solve Corpus Christi's.

But when Texas spends billions of dollars building pipelines, pumping stations and storage facilities that may operate for generations, it makes sense to ask whether those projects can be designed to work with infrastructure that hasn't been built yet.

The Harbor Island project makes that question particularly timely.

Producing up to 100 million gallons of potable water each day would be an extraordinary engineering achievement. But producing water is only part of a water-supply system.

The other part is getting that water where it needs to go.

Perhaps Texas' biggest water innovation won't ultimately be a new reservoir, a desalination plant or one enormous pipeline.

It may be learning to make all those pieces work together.

Texas has spent generations building networks to move oil, natural gas, electricity, people and information across enormous distances.

Water may be the next great Texas infrastructure network.

Danny Tyler is a longtime industrial-controls professional from West Texas.

This article originally appeared on Corpus Christi Caller Times: Corpus Christi's water problem may point to bigger solution | Opinion

Reporting by Danny Tyler, Opinion contributor / Corpus Christi Caller Times

USA TODAY Network via Reuters Connect