Texas uses long-term debt to finance a variety of projects and program areas. State debt is issued by state agencies and universities. It does not include local debt. As of August 31, 2015, Texas had approximately $41.0 billion in state bonds outstanding (excluding $6.1 billion in revenue conduit issuances not a legal liability of the state). Appropriations include $4.0 billion for debt service requirements in the 2016-17 biennium. As of February 2016 Texas’ General Obligation debt was rated at Aaa/AAA/AAA by the three major credit rating agencies.

Types Of Bonds

General Obligation (GO Bonds)
GO bonds are backed by the full faith and credit of the state. GO bond authority must be approved by two-thirds of both chambers to be placed on the ballot, then approved by a majority of voters.

Non-General Obligation Debt (Revenue Bonds)
Revenue bonds are authorized by the Legislature, secured by a specific revenue source, and do not require voter approval. Some bonds are not subject to authorization limits. Certain self-supported bonds are governed by Comptroller’s projections for their funding source. University bonds rated equal to or higher than AA- may be issued without Bond Review Board approval. Other issuers have a variety of legislative limits based on debt service, annual issuance limits, or evergreen authority.

Repayment Category of Bonds

Self-Supporting Debt
Self-supporting debt is expected to be repaid with revenues other than General Revenue (GR) (e.g., loan repayments).

Not Self-Supporting Debt
Not self-supporting debt is expected to be repaid with GR (e.g., repair and construction projects).

Conduit Debt
Conduit debt is issued by state entities on behalf of third parties and is not a legal liability of the state.

Tuition Revenue Bonds
Tuition revenue bonds are legally self-supporting. However, the Legislature typically appropriates GR to reimburse institutions for their debt service on the bonds.

Outstanding Debt by Government Function FY 2015

The Texas Public Finance Authority (TPFA) issues debt on behalf of multiple state agencies and certain universities. Other state issuers include the Water Development Board, the Texas Veterans Land Board, all state university debt not issued by TPFA, and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT). Note that TxDOT is included in the Business and Economic Development government function.

Outstanding Debt by Repayment Category

Conduit, Component & Related Organizations
Tuition Revenue Bonds
Not Self-Supporting
Self-Supporting

Constitutional Debt Limit

(ratio of not self-supported debt authorized to unrestricted, available GR)

Authorized Bond Debt
Authorized Bond Debt is all debt that has been authorized by the Legislature.

Issued Bond Debt
Issued Bond Debt, or outstanding debt, is debt that has been sold and for which payments of principal and interest must be made over its established repayment schedule. It includes all debt. Only debt that is not self-supporting is included in the Constitutional Debt Limit.

Authorized But Unissued Debt
Authorized but Unissued Debt is debt that may be issued at any time without further action by the Legislature.

Article III, Section 49(j) of the Texas Constitution limits the authorization of additional state debt if in any fiscal year the resulting annual debt service payable from unrestricted GR (not self-supporting debt), excluding constitutionally dedicated revenues, exceeds 5.0 percent of the average annual unrestricted GR for the previous three years. As of fiscal year 2015, the ratio of debt service on outstanding or issued debt was 1.38 percent; including debt service for authorized but unissued debt increases the ratio to 2.65 percent. The increase in authorized debt from fiscal year 2007 to 2008 occurred due to the passage of three ballot propositions: Proposition 4 (TPFA), Proposition 12 (TxDOT), and Proposition 15 (Cancer Prevention & Research Institute of Texas).
Local governments in Texas issue debt to finance construction and renovation of government facilities, public infrastructure, and various other projects authorized by law. Local governments issue two main types of debt – tax-supported General Obligation (GO) and Revenue Debt. GO debt is secured by the full faith and credit of the issuer’s ad valorem tax revenue while Revenue Debt is secured by a specified revenue source. Total outstanding local debt as of August 31, 2015 was $212.4 billion including approximately $8.2 billion of conduit debt.

Since 2004, as the overall level of local indebtedness grew from $109.0 billion to $212.4 billion, the distribution of debt changed. Cities, towns, and villages owed proportionally less debt, while school districts and other special districts (largely driven by the North Texas Tollway Authority) owed proportionally more.

Issued debt is categorized by the BRB as Refunding Debt or New Money Debt. Refunding debt is issued to refinance all or a portion of outstanding debt. New money debt is issued to finance construction and renovation of government facilities, public infrastructure, and various other projects authorized by law. A majority of bond issuances in 2015 were for the purpose of refunding debt.