

# Tribune

EAST VALLEY • SCOTTSDALE

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## Our View: Vanishing funds show need to plan

Tribune Editorial

This week's news about money for transportation and road construction suddenly disappearing isn't reason for immediate alarm, but it does create more urgency for state and local officials to develop better long-range strategies.

As reported in the Tribune, the Legislature has taken \$20 million that had been set aside to design the East Valley's next major freeway — the planned state Route 802 from Mesa to Florence Junction. Meanwhile, the Maricopa Association of Governments has revised sharply downward estimates of how much money will be available for transportation projects through 2025. In 2004, when voters renewed a special county sales tax, the estimate was about \$12 billion from all sources. Now, transportation planners are projecting they will have only \$7 billion and they are beginning the process of determining which future freeway and light-rail projects won't get funding anytime soon.

A federal stimulus package might fill in some of the gaps, but only for those projects described as "shovel-ready" or at the point where construction could begin almost immediately. Even then, only about a fifth of all requested projects would see any additional federal support.

This abrupt erosion in state and local funding has been caused by the year-old recession. But a silver lining, at least for transportation planning, is the economic slowdown also apparently has halted the Valley's explosive population growth.

Most people believe this is only a temporary delay and more people will start moving here again once the economy recovers. But Arizona and the Valley have at least a little breathing room to reassess the state's transportation plans for the next two decades and to develop realistic methods for completing them.

The Tribune has been quoting a variety of experts since 2000 that have pointed out the state's needs are many and diverse, and there simply aren't enough resources available under the current arrangements to meet most of them.

Any successful solutions will require our elected representatives to tackle some unpopular notions, such as revising the state gasoline tax and forging partnerships with private interests for alternatives such as toll roads.

It won't be easy for our leaders to convince the public to thinking differently about how we pay to get around. But if they fail to do so, development of this vital infrastructure will continue to fall further behind.





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