

Road projects in area are progressing, but dwindling funds pose challenges

By **Andrea Kelly**

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The state of our streets is simple: Projects under way are making progress, mostly on schedule, but funding will be a bigger issue as less and less of it comes in each year, transportation officials said Thursday.

Tucson roads

The city is down about 80 employees, and is seeing budgets decline more than expected, said Jim Glock, director of the city Transportation Department.

Glock said the road funding from the state gas tax "is not a sustainable funding source. We're going to need to have conversations with the community on how else to manage that." The department is on a "safety-first" maintenance schedule.

But several projects are still being done to make Tucson easier to get around, including construction on the Fourth Avenue Underpass and Mountain Avenue, and the city is planning many more improvements using Regional Transportation funding, Glock said.

Pima County roads

In Pima County, the taxes that pay for transportation are down a total of 17 percent compared with last year, said Priscilla Cornelio, director of the county Transportation Department. The department also is down about 80 positions, which has helped avoid layoffs and meet continually declining budgets, she said.

Reduced budgets mean regular maintenance goes by the wayside and only emergencies are on the front burner, she said.

However, the Regional Transportation funding is helping the department keep up with road widenings, she said.

State roads

Most of the state road projects going on right now, as well as the massive Interstate 10 widening project in Tucson, are ahead of schedule, or at least on schedule, said Greg Gentsch, the state's engineer for this region.

But as funding for transportation continues to dwindle, the state is ready to spend federal stimulus money in Pima County and hopes there will be a second round of funding for even more projects, Gentsch said. "We're going to spend every cent we can get our hands on," he said.

Contact reporter Andrea Kelly at 573-4243 or akelly@azstarnet.com.

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