



Billions for roads?

By HOWARD FISCHER
Capitol Media Services
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PHOENIX -- Business leaders are hoping enough Arizonans are stuck in traffic long enough that they're willing to hike the state sales tax by a full penny a dollar.

The TIME Coalition will roll out a comprehensive \$42.6 billion plan this week to build new roads and widen existing ones.

Among the potential projects in northern Arizona are:

Milton Road reconstruction in Flagstaff and replacement of railroad bridge

Reconstruct Lake Mary Road

New lanes on U.S. 89 from Flagstaff to Page

I-17 widening from Flagstaff to Phoenix

Additional lanes on I-40 throughout Northern Arizona

Widen U.S. 160 to Four Corners area

The plan also includes more than \$7 billion for mass transit, including an expanded light rail system in Maricopa County, a new one in Pima County, additional buses and vanpool services through the rest of the state -- and an ambitious plan to begin commuter rail service between Tucson and Phoenix, and possibly beyond.

All that would be financed by boosting the state's sales tax a penny, to 6.6 percent, for 30 years.

But members of the group, whose name is short for Transportation and Infrastructure Moving AZ's Economy, already are starting at a disadvantage.

The original plan had been to get the Legislature to give its tacit approval to the package and put it before voters. But Marty Shultz, a lobbyist for Arizona Public Service, said that fell through when the lawmakers who chair the House and Senate Transportation committees refused to go along.

That means an expensive campaign just to gather the 153,365 signatures by July 3 to put the issue on the November ballot, even before trying to sell it to voters.

Sen. Ron Gould, R-Lake Havasu City, who chairs the Senate Transportation panel, said he doubts it will fly, especially with rural voters.

"You're going to take money out of my district to use in Maricopa County," he said.

But Roc Arnett, president of the East Valley Partnership, said the package was purposely designed so there is a little something for everyone. That even includes Gould's district, where the plan includes everything from widening of Interstate 40 right down to reconstructing London Bridge

Road in Gould's home town.

And Shultz said Gould and others may have it backward. He said the state's two metropolitan areas are "donors" to the rest of the state and the trick might be to convince residents there, who already have freeways and some mass transit -- much of it paid for with higher local sales taxes -- to tax themselves again for projects in rural areas.

ENDORSEMENT FROM GOVERNOR

The idea of higher taxes already has gotten an endorsement from Gov. Janet Napolitano who is pushing it as an stimulus package for the state's lackluster economy: She said more road construction means more jobs.

"And those are jobs that cannot be outsourced," the governor said. "If you're building a transportation system, you've got to build it right here in Arizona."

Arnett and Shultz said that, technically speaking, the decision to use only sales taxes is not official. But they both acknowledged there are obstacles to using the other two likely sources of revenue

Now, road projects are financed largely through the state's 18-cent-a-gallon gasoline tax, vehicle license fees and federal highway aid.

Hiking the gasoline tax by itself was dismissed as an answer, as each penny increase brings in less than \$40 million a year.

Complicating matters, Shultz noted that as vehicles become more fuel efficient, motorists will be buying less per car, making gasoline taxes a potentially decreasing source of revenues.

Shultz said there has been some sentiment to use "impact fees," essentially taxes on the construction of new homes.

"The public believes that growth should pay for itself," he said. But Shultz said the new roads and transit improvements are going to benefit everyone.

And the idea of impact fees also would draw opposition from developers.

Spencer Kamps, lobbyist for the Home Builders Association of Central Arizona, said the nature of impact fees, now levied by local governments, is to deal with the "impact" a new residential community has on the neighborhood. He said it's one thing to pay for new parks and fire protection. But Kamps said tacking \$500 or more onto the cost of a home in Page to pay for freeways in Yuma makes no sense.

And Kamps said that kind of approach ignores the strain that commercial and industrial users, who are not subject to many of the same fees, put on the road system.

NEW RAIL LINE CONTROVERSIAL

Potentially the most controversial part of the package is going to be convincing voters to spend money to build and operate a rail line between Tucson and Phoenix -- and, potentially later, up through Surprise, Wickenburg and even Prescott. Arnett, however, said he believes the demand already is there.

He said shuttle companies already run dozens of trips a day each way between Tucson and Phoenix, many of those connecting specifically to Sky Harbor International Airport. And that doesn't include all the vehicles with one or two passengers.

Arnett said the demand for inter-city travel will increase as people want to get to Williams-Gateway Airport as passenger traffic there takes off.

Gould, however, scoffs at the whole idea of rail, both inter-city and commuter, as "elitist."

"They want the regular folks to use mass transit so the rich folks can drive their cars," he said.

Napolitano said she believes voters can be convinced to hike their own taxes if they "focus ... on the future that we are building."

"We will grow better and smarter with a statewide transportation system that works for all different kinds of communities," she said. And Napolitano said having an organized, planned system will promote growth along the identified transportation "corridors."

Arnett said initiative organizers are working with a list of critical needs for the next 30 years prepared by the state Department of Transportation. He said while the final list of projects to be funded is not yet ready, it will be by the time voters go to the polls on Nov. 4.

Major projects likely to be funded*

(NOTE: This is based on a "critical needs study" conducted by the Arizona Department of Transportation. But what actually will be put onto the list will not be determined until after the initiative petitions are filed, though it will be before the Nov. 4 election.)

Public transit:

- Phoenix-Tucson inter-city rail
- Maricopa commuter rail expansion
- Pima commuter rail system
- Double number of Maricopa express buses
- Develop Pima express bus network
- Statewide vanpool expansion
- Rural bus service for Graham, Greenlee, Gila and Pinal counties
- Expand Bisbee bus service
- New bus service in Yuma area to Foothills and San Luis

Freeways and major roads:

- I-17 widening Flagstaff to Phoenix
- New I-10 "reliever" freeway between Buckeye and yet-to-be-built South Mountain Freeway
- New freeways west of White Tank Mountains
- Extension of Loop 303 south from I-10 to I-8
- Rebuild SR 85 between Buckeye and Gila Bend to freeway standards

- Rebuild SR 74 (Carefree Highway) to freeway standards from I-17 to Hassayampa Freeway
- Widen I-10 throughout state
- New lanes on I-19 in Tucson area
- Double SR 85 from Lukeville to Ajo to four lanes
- Widen SR 86 in Pima County
- Widen SR 77 in Pima County and from Show Low to Holbrook
- Additional lanes on I-40 throughout Northern Arizona
- New lanes on US 89 from Flagstaff to Page
- Widen US 160 to Four Corners area
- Improvements on I-018 from California state line to Telegraph Pass
- Additional lanes on US 70 between Globe and Safford
- Widen SR 90 from Benson to Sierra Vista
- Reconstruct US 191 in Cochise County to four lanes
- Revamp US 93 between Wickenburg and I-40
- Extend SR 210 (Barraza Parkway) in Tucson

Principal arterials and local roads:

- New port of entry in Douglas
- Buffalo Soldier Trail reconstruction in Sierra Vista
- Paving of International Border Road in Douglas
- Expressway construction south from Avenue D to San Luis Port of Entry No. 2
- Milton Road reconstruction in Flagstaff and replacement of railroad bridge
- Widen Meridian Road in Mesa and Queen Creek
- Reconstruct Lake Mary Road
- Broadway Road extension in Clarkdale
- Rail crossing alternatives in Winslow
- Rebuild Broadway Boulevard in Tucson
- Widen Twin Peaks, Ajo Way, Tucson
- Reconstruct Sahaurita Road

-- Source: Arizona Department of Transportation

*Based on a "critical needs study" conducted by the Arizona Department of Transportation. Final list dependent on the initiative making the ballot and passing on Nov. 4.