

## Surprise is looking for state transportation plan help

by **Tony Lombardo** - Jun. 13, 2008 06:29 AM  
The Arizona Republic

City leaders are still trying to get more bang out of every Surprise resident's buck in the \$42 billion statewide transportation plan that is under review and could go on the November ballot.

The official project list is still under consideration, but the plan has gone on a road show to **Arizona** cities to debate them. Expected projects include expansion of Interstates 40, 17, 10 and 8, as well as more Valley light rail, commuter rail and bus improvements.

One of the chief funding sources proposed would be a voter-approved sales-tax increase of 1 cent on each \$1 purchase.

Thus far, Surprise officials have been disappointed in the plan. Surprise has long considered transportation its No. 1 priority, and leaders and residents alike are looking for traffic alleviation, especially along Bell Road.

Mayor Lyn Truitt said the city is focusing its efforts on a few important projects, with hopes that funding for them will appear in subsequent drafts of the statewide plan.

At the top of the Surprise wish list is added assurance that Loop 303's conversion to a freeway takes place, along with planned widening of Grand Avenue, City Engineer Bob Maki said.

"Those are already in the program," Maki said. "We just want to make sure there's funding."

An area-wide concern exists that projects planned in Proposition 400, a half-cent sales tax approved by voters in 2004, will be underfunded due to rising construction costs, Maki said.

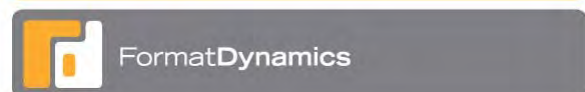
Under Prop. 400, Loop 303 is to be expanded to six lanes between I-10 and Grand Avenue, Maki said.

The new statewide plan reserves \$1.4 billion for local access to Loop 303, Maki said. This money could be used to finish the Loop 303 project outlined in Prop. 400 if necessary, he reasoned.

Along Grand Avenue, existing plans are to create six continuous lanes from 99th Avenue to Loop 303, Maki said. That work is outlined in the regional transportation plan and is scheduled for sometime after 2011. **In terms of new projects, the city is asking state officials to consider adding to this fall's proposed plan an east-west roadway called the White Tanks Freeway.**

Already outlined in the state's plan is a possible toll road called the Hassayampa Freeway, a north-south artery west of

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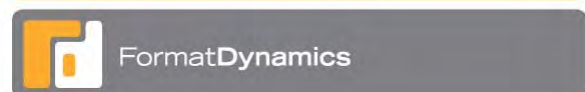
Surprise that would go from Wickenburg south to I-10, Maki said. Surprise proposes to add to that the White Tanks Freeway, running from the Hassayampa Freeway east to Grand Avenue.

If the state does not provide some east-west corridors somewhere between Wickenburg and I-10, then I-10 will be overloaded, Maki said.

Whether Surprise is successful in adding those provisions, it will still be necessary to support an initiative that would benefit the region, Truitt said. People should not see Surprise as "poor sports" or "not able to see the need on the larger scale."

"Is (the plan) the way we would like to see it happen? So far, no," Truitt said. "But sometimes that's the way it goes, and you just stay there and you keep working at it."

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