

State Board approves local transportation projects; funding still pending

The State Transportation Board voted unanimously when it met for the final of four hearings on Thursday to approve a revised list of 30 years worth of transportation projects, pending voter approval for tax levies to pay the bill.

The changes to this list that affect the citizens of Maricopa include the inclusion of \$208 million to widen the 347 from four to six lanes and \$35 million to build an overpass on State Route 347 at the Union Pacific Railroad crossing.

Previously, Maricopa was slated to receive partial funding for the widening project.

Other projects in Pinal County that made the list include the widening of the Interstate-10 to six lanes from Riggs Road to Interstate 8 and improvements to State Route 77 and the U.S. 60.

The Arizona Department of Transportation and its planning partners from around the state developed the \$42.5 billion Statewide Transportation Investment Strategy.

“This is just a list of projects that the Arizona Department of Transportation views as critical to the future growth of the state,” said Sally Stewart, an ADOT spokeswoman.

However, all the projects remain unfunded.

One possible source of funding is a 1-cent sales tax increase backed by Arizona Governor Janet Napolitano and the TIME Coalition.

The coalition, whose name is an acronym for Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona’s Economy, is a private group of business leaders and community members who formed to promote the 1-cent increase to generate an estimated \$43 billion in funding to cover transportation improvements throughout the state.

Before Arizonans will have a chance to approve or deny the measure, the group must gather 155,000 signatures of registered voters by July 3 to get it printed on the November ballot.

“I believe we will easily reach this goal and possible even double it,” said Jordan Rose, an attorney with the Rose Law Group who represents Pinal County serving on the coalition.

“This is going to require statewide voter approval, but I think we can pull it off,” Rose said

The sales tax rate in Maricopa is 8.7 percent, of which 2 percent goes toward the city, 1.1 percent to the county and 5.6 percent to the state.

If passed, voters would see the tax increase in 2010. ADOT could immediately thereafter begin borrowing against estimated earnings.

“The state needs to complete these transportation projects to move forward,” Stewart said.

