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CYMPO endorses transportation sales tax hike

By Cindy Barks

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PRESCOTT - A state "transportation crisis" - complete with deteriorating roads, a growing population, and dwindling money for new projects - got the attention of the local transportation planning organization this week.

In a unanimous vote Wednesday night, members of the Central Yavapai Metropolitan Planning Organization's executive board endorsed a voter initiative that would increase the state sales tax by 1 percent.

But that does not mean that the initiative has fully satisfied all of the local officials on the board.

"I can tell you I don't like this initiative very much," said Yavapai County Supervisor Carol Springer, chair of the CYMPO executive board. "But it's the only game in town, and we have to seize this opportunity."

Prescott City Councilman Robert Luzius, also voiced concerns about the initiative, which he said "was done too hurriedly."

Luzius worried that the state would find a way to use some of the sales tax money for purposes that would go beyond the goals of the initiative.

"Every time we turn around, we've got the state in our pockets," Luzius said, referring to declining revenues that local governments receive from sources such as Highway User Revenue Funds. "Who's to say - in the next 30 years - what other schemes they might come up with?"

But Prescott Valley Town Councilman Mike Flannery noted that the initiative language includes precautions against such actions.

"There are two separate areas in which there are firewalls built in," Flannery said.

And Arizona State Transportation Board member Bill Feldmeier, a member of the CYMPO executive board, warned about what could happen to the state's transportation system if the initiative does not

Among the transportation enhancements that Yavapai County could expect from the TIME (Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy) sales tax increase initiative are:

- \$525 million to widen Interstate 17 to six lanes from New River to Cordes Junction.
- \$633 million to widen I-17 to six lanes from Cordes Junction to the Yavapai County line.
- \$340 million to widen Highway 89 to four lanes from Chino Valley to Interstate 40.
- \$299 million to complete the Fain Connector/Fain Road/Highway 89A/Great Western Corridor.
- \$41 million for the Hassayampa freeway network (a public-private partnership originating in Maricopa County and terminating at Highway 93 in the Wickenburg area).
- \$428 million for strategic rail and transit projects.
- \$261 million for local mobility projects and programs.
- \$57 million for transportation enhancement and walkable/bikeable communities.

get voter approval.

While noting that local officials should get their questions answered, Feldmeier said, "The bigger picture is we're in a transportation crisis in this state. It's in our face, and it's crisis mode."

Altogether, the total for Yavapai County projects would be about \$2.6 billion.

Feldmeier added: "We've got to recognize that if this doesn't pass, we're in deep, deep trouble."

Chino Valley Mayor Karen Fann began the discussion by noting that - under the current financial situation - the [Arizona Department of Transportation](#) would run out of money for new road projects within the next four to five years.

"ADOT is telling us that there will be no new money for new roads," Fann said. "All the money will be going into maintenance."

That was also the gist of a pamphlet that Sarah Morgan, vice president of the Arizona Chapter of Associated General Contractors, which is participating in the initiative campaign, delivered to the CYMPO board.

Among the information in the pamphlet was a section on "the dire conditions" of the state's transportation system.

For instance, it noted: "If we do nothing, in 20 years Arizona drivers will spend 75 percent more time commuting than they do now, facing worse traffic than present-day Los Angeles."

The initiative, which seeks to generate revenue to cover billions of dollars worth of transportation needs over the next 30 years, likely will be on the general election ballot in November.

If voters approve it, the tax increase would take effect in January 2010. It would increase by one cent the state's current sales tax rate of 5.6 percent.

That is before the various cities, towns and counties add their own sales taxes. Shoppers in Prescott, for example, also pay a 2-percent city tax and a .75-percent county tax, resulting in a total of 8.35 percent.

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