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**TUESDAY JULY 22, 2008** Last modified:

Saturday, June 28, 2008 3:08 PM MDT

ADOT Director provides view of future

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The Daily Dispatch

Mayors, council and city staff from Cochise County as well as Northern Sonora., Mexico, were in attend Monthly Mayors meeting, this month hosted by Douglas and new Mayor Mike Gomez.

The guest speaker was Arizona Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez, who presented a presentation on the new long-range transportation plan, and how it affects Cochise County.

Mendez was appointed Director of the Department on October 23, 2001. Prior to his appointment as Director as Deputy Director of ADOT, as well as Deputy State Engineer for the Department's Valley Transportation where, under his leadership, a plan was developed and implemented to accelerate the Regional Freeway in Maricopa County by seven years. Victor has been with the ADOT since 1985.

Work on the long-range plan has been in the works for some time at the state level, and has included several hearings or forums on the matter.

In mid June, the State Transportation Board adopted the Statewide Transportation Investment Strategy, a comprehensive transportation improvement program for Arizona, as part of the State's Long-Range Transportation Plan.

The \$42.5 billion Statewide Transportation Investment Strategy was developed by ADOT and its planning around the state. The investment strategy allows ADOT to continue to work with local communities to promote growth, preserve quality of life and minimize impacts on the natural environment.

"The investment strategy creates a statewide vision for transportation with diverse solutions for diverse needs," ADOT Director Victor Mendez, who has spent the past six months traveling the state to provide information on the strategy and listen to comments.

The strategy is based on a list of "Critical Transportation Needs" that was submitted to Governor Janet Napolitano earlier this year in response to Executive Order 2008-02.

The Statewide Transportation Investment Strategy, which currently is not funded, would provide improvements to existing roads, build new roads, develop high-speed and commuter rail, expand transit services, and create an environmental conservation fund.

“Transportation has been a high priority for Governor Napolitano,” Mendez said.

“The program addresses necessary forward thinking, such as transit and rail, to move us into our future with dependence upon gasoline and with transportation options that will reduce the time tax,” said Mendez. “We received very good input. We are hearing around the state that transportation funding is crucial and that our state thrive as a state depends upon improvements to our transportation system.”

During the meeting, Mendez discussed looking at other areas of funding, including public-private partnerships. Now, ADOT is dependant on fuel tax for its revenue, and as people drive less due to fuel prices, it has less revenue for road construction and maintenance.

“The original total needs statewide have been pared down from \$165 billion to the new budget of \$42.5 billion. We are still facing challenges that impact that work. Construction costs have increased 60 percent, and coupled with higher fuel costs, it could make it more difficult to get these projects completed. And Arizona has not stopped growing. We are preparing for an increase in population from 5.1 million residents in 2005 to 14.1 million in 2050,” Mendez said.

The big push during the next several years will be a transit program that will include rail. The most discussed project has a train traveling between Tucson and Phoenix.

“The present program has \$539 million targeted for use in Cochise County,” Mendez said.



ADOT Director Victor Mendez talks to representative from communities across the county concerning the long-range transportation plan, including transit and a rail service between Tucson and Phoenix.