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## Transportation plan must come from the public

### **Our idea: Proposed tax to modernize roads, rails lacked grass-roots support**

The T.I.M.E. initiative skidded off the road this week. The initiative to raise the state's sales tax by one cent for 30 years to pay for transportation projects was killed in court, but its success was always deeply at risk.

Had the proposal gone onto the November ballot, it may not have been approved by tax-weary Arizonans.

Though knowledgeable people made strong arguments that the new tax was needed in order to modernize Arizona's transportation system, the average Arizonan had no real investment in the proposal and certainly no passion for it.

T.I.M.E. — Transportation and Infrastructure Moving AZ's Economy — was a top-down effort supported by the governor and financed by business, which reportedly spent some \$1 million for paid petition circulators working on a per-signature basis. They collected 87 percent of the signatures in Maricopa County.

Our idea is for the T.I.M.E. coalition to take a page from the people-oriented approach of the Regional Transportation Authority, which won a May 2006 mandate from Pima County voters, and by Envision Utah, the standard-bearer for regional planning for growth.

The RTA and Envision Utah used grass-roots planning to bring the public on board before settling on priorities and going to a vote. In Utah, citizens twice approved new taxes to pay for more orderly growth.

The Regional Transportation Authority's 20-year, multimodal plan to improve Tucson-area transportation systems — paid for by a half-cent sales tax — grew out of extensive grass-roots regional planning.

The plan was developed by a 35-member Regional Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee in conjunction with a 22-member Technical/Management Committee of local jurisdictions' transportation managers and private-sector experts. The public involvement in the plan's development included 27 open houses and more than 100 group presentations — and several revisions.

That's how to get people excited, invested and willing to pay more taxes to benefit their future: They don't merely understand the need for the projects, they actually define them.

T.I.M.E.'s priorities and proposed financing were defined from on high. While its plans might have been near-ideal for meeting the state's needs and investing in local transportation needs, voters probably would not have been swept up by the vision.

T.I.M.E. Campaign Chairman David Martin told Capitol Media Services this week that the transportation crisis still remains. He said the state will face a \$160 billion transportation revenue shortfall over the next 30 years.

Marty Shultz, treasurer of the road-tax campaign, told Capitol Media Services the proposal will have to be resurrected.

Si Schorr, a Tucson attorney and a member of the State Transportation Board, told us Thursday there are "only three ways" to raise the kind of money Arizona will need for its transportation systems over the next three decades:

"One, it's passed by the Legislature, the House, the Senate, and the governor signs it. I think that's extremely remote.

"Two, the Legislature allows an initiative to be voted upon. They have so far refused to do so and I think this is also extraordinarily remote.

"Three, you can do what the T.I.M.E. people tried to do. Collect signatures to put it on the ballot. That's

costly."

Among the politicians, Schorr said, "No one wants to say, 'An added sales tax — I'm in favor of that.' "

As the RTA and Envision Utah have demonstrated, if you give people a chance to study how their transportation needs will evolve and ask them to work together to plan for meeting those needs, voters might say, "An added sales tax — I'm in favor of that."

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