

Town Hall outlines recommendations for future of transportation

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Transportation is a hot topic on every municipality's list of priorities.

So to gather suggestions and present information to help solve transportation problems, Arizona Town Hall presented a discussion Friday for West Valley leaders and business representatives.

The group discussed recommendations from the 94th Arizona Town Hall, which was earlier this year. The recommendations included establishing a citizen transportation review commission, incorporating existing resources, studies and reports, protecting and securing needed funding and improving coordination between land-use planning and transportation.

Arizona Town Hall is a non-partisan think tank of Arizona leaders, who create reports on various topics that help influence Arizona public policy.

On Friday, 75 attendees at Rio Salado Lifelong Learning Center in Surprise heard short presentations by representatives of Arizona Department of Transportation, WESTMARC, Sun Health Properties and others.

The event was co-hosted by the cities of El Mirage and Surprise.

John McGee, executive director of planning and policy of ADOT, spoke about lost funding for highways because of a combination of factors, including the poor economy, lower revenues and the transfer of highway funds to Arizona's general fund.

"I believe the future will look dramatically different than it did the past 50 years," McGee said.

Among the considerations, McGee said, are toll roads and sales and fuel taxes, the latter which has not been raised to reflect inflation since 1991.

Joe La Rue, executive vice president of Sun Health Properties, said rural transportation for the elderly and disabled is a critical need.

At the end of the meeting, Tara Jackson, president of Arizona Town Hall, summarized the presentations and public input:

- Help shape federal transportation legislation.
- Dedicate state funding to Highway User Revenue Fund.
- Explore commuter rail and other alternative means of transportation.
- Meet the needs of a growing senior population and a growing population of those who can't or don't want to drive anymore.

For information, visit www.aztownhall.org.