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Tax-funded transportation plan backers refuse to give up

Group shifting from voters to legislators

by [Glen Creno](#) - Sept. 13, 2008 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

The group behind a multibillion-dollar statewide transportation plan is refusing to give up its fight despite fall's year's ballot.

The TIME Coalition, which sought to place its tax-funded transportation plan before voters this fall, says it aggressively pursue its goals, this time targeting lawmakers instead of voters.

The \$42.6 billion voter initiative was tossed out because there were not enough valid signatures to make it but two court rulings, including one by the state Supreme Court, effectively killed the initiative.

TIME now says it will try to get the transportation plan passed by the Legislature next year. If that fails, the initiative.

"The bottom line is something needs to be done. We plan on continuing the TIME Coalition to address the TIME campaign and president of the Arizona chapter of the Associated General Contractors of America.

Martin also said the contractors group will step up its political activities separately from TIME. He said the backing pro-transportation candidates for the Legislature and working to have those they regard as opponents consider running advertising during the Legislative session urging lawmakers to pass transportation bills.

TIME's transportation plan would have raised the state's sales tax by a penny per dollar over 30 years to fall across the state. The coalition says that although its initiative was unsuccessful, it raised awareness of the

Arizona, like many other states, is struggling to find money to pay for transportation projects. The state Department will run out of money to build new roads outside Maricopa and Pima counties in 2015.

The idea of raising Arizona's sales tax to pay for transportation was supported by Gov. Janet Napolitano a But it didn't sell well with anti-tax legislators and economic-advocacy groups.

"We felt that this one was a bad deal for the taxpayers," said Steve Voeller, president of the Arizona Free

TIME (Transportation & Infrastructure Moving AZ's Economy), which started organizing in spring 2007, said because the Legislature didn't.

Now, the group is waiting to see who wins in the November election, who will have leadership positions in Senate, and who will run the transportation committee in each chamber. Those decisions will have a lot of

transportation plans go forward.

"Hopefully, someone will step forward and become the champion for this cause," said Tom Dorn, a Phoenix resident who worked as ADOT's state and federal liaison. "The Legislature is elected to get these major policy issues done."

If the results of the past legislative session are an indicator, it will be difficult to get lawmakers excited about transportation. They have devoted much of their time wrestling with a budget deficit, and money will probably be tight again next year.

"I don't see any disposition to do anything," said pollster Michael O'Neil, head of O'Neil Associates in Tempe. "The Legislature is focused on short-term measures, and transportation is a long-term problem."

Another high-profile group also is talking up transportation. A group of developers, government officials, and university researchers working on a plan for development of the Phoenix region, 13,000 square miles in Maricopa County, says transportation planning is a big part of the mix.

Moving AZ One estimates the region needs \$25 billion in transportation investment over 20 years, with about 100 projects.

The group now will seek public input on its initial conclusions before putting together its vision for the future of the Phoenix region, whereas TIME's focus is statewide.

Even though ADOT says it will make TIME's transportation package part of its long-term planning, the state still has a long way to go for the projects.

Martin said people in his contractors group are tired of waiting for a comprehensive plan to be enacted. He says it "awakened a giant" with a lot of financial clout.

TIME reported that it received contributions of more than \$1.1 million from the beginning of this year to August. The bulk of those donations came from individuals.

TIME says its plan was based on a list of "critical" transportation needs compiled by ADOT and transit planners. The plan was submitted to the governor as part of a longer-term assessment still under way. TIME says that rather than focusing on existing infrastructure, what is necessary is finding new money for transportation.

"It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see we need additional lanes between Phoenix and Flagstaff, and Phoenix and Prescott," he said.

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