

Changes are urgently needed to fix Arizona transportation

By [Carol West](#), Inside Tucson Business

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Transportation is at a critical crossroads in Arizona. Business will suffer if the state's infrastructure is not improved, according to the Business Journal in Phoenix. Based on Arizona's budget issues and tax structure, additional funding to do this will be hard to come by.

Arizona's Sun Corridor — generally stretching from Prescott north of Phoenix to Sierra Vista and the Mexican border south of Tucson — occupies 10 percent of Arizona's land area but has 80 percent of the population growth, as was noted at the April Arizona Town Hall on transportation.

Highway conditions throughout the state and in our cities are deteriorating. Congestion is an issue in Tucson and Phoenix, which means investments in alternate modes of transportation will have to play a bigger role in the future — more bicycle and pedestrian accommodations and more convenient transit and light rail.

There is also a need to consider the connectivity of land use, economics, and transportation for a more sustainable community. This would also save money. For example, the town hall conclusion suggested that requirements for developments “include linkages to an existing transportation corridor, and land use plans should research and include increased transportation capacity wherever necessary.” Mixed-use development should be encouraged so people can be closer to their workplaces.

Arizona State University's L. William Seidman Research Institute has estimated Arizona needs \$500 billion in infrastructure improvements over the next 25 years, with transportation infrastructure upgrades costs estimated to make up half of that total. Arizonans will have to come together to determine funding options for these much needed improvements.

Our present transportation system is underfunded. Federal and state gas taxes used for transportation are only 18 cents per gallon. There are federal grants available along with limited state lottery funding for transit. Part of the state vehicle license fee is used for transportation. Pima County has established the Regional Transportation Authority with a half-cent sales tax to fund area transportation projects.

Those attending the transportation town hall were concerned with securing increased transportation funding.

Updating the fuel tax to reflect inflation occurring since 1991 and encouraging Arizona's Congressional delegation to aggressively pursue all available new federal transportation funding were recommended by town hall attendees.

The town hall also urged the governor to prohibit the use of the gas tax for items other than transportation. The Arizona Department of Public Safety's highway patrol, for example, has often received some of these funds.

Other funding strategies included allowing for private investment in the state's transportation system and enabling the implementation of toll roads with congestion pricing, which means those traveling on the toll roads in high volume traffic hours would pay more.

While all of these are good suggestions, a dedicated funding source is needed. But a state-wide transportation funding

initiative, primarily organized by the Phoenix business community, fell short of the required signatures to be placed on last November's general election ballot.

Also, the public needs education on the need for more transportation funding. If the dedicated funding option is an increase in the sales tax, voters may be wary. Arizona already has one of the highest sales taxes in the nation.

A survey of funding options used in other states would be worth exploring to see if they would be a good idea for Arizona.

Arizonans must come up with a way to pay for much-needed transportation planning and improvements across the state. If we fail, we will find businesses locating elsewhere. All of us must work to find ways to make this investment. Jobs and quality of life are at stake.

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