

ADOT director eager for funding alternatives in wake of cutbacks

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GOLD CANYON — Speaking a day after his department announced major cost savings measures would be enacted by shutting down more than a dozen rest stops throughout the state and cutting back in the Motor Vehicles Department, Arizona Department of Transportation director John Halikowski told a Pinal County audience other funding options may need to be explored.

As part of a four-person panel at the monthly Pinal Partnership meeting that included Americans for Prosperity Arizona director Tom Jenney and Pinal County Board of Supervisors Chairman David Snider, Halikowski's sobering news held the lion's share of interest.

"We're not going to be able to continue operations as we have in the past," said Halikowski, while making the caveat that ADOT would continue ahead with a number of state-funded construction projects in 2010. "Pinal County sits at a crossroads. We're going to need options... but we need to solve the governance problem before we can solve the funding problem."

One possible solution moving forward was the possibility of large-scale public-private partnerships – and not just for toll roads, Halikowski said.

"We're looking at it in a very robust fashion," he said, adding ADOT wanted to start reviewing serious P3 proposals for a variety of projects in January. "Do not mistake caution for a lack of enthusiasm. We want to protect the taxpayers' money."

Such thinking was music to the ears of Jenney, who said the government must find ways to be more efficient with taxpayer dollars.

"We're going to have to raise gas taxes, find a new revenue source or look at public-private partnerships and that third option is the way I think we should go," Jenney said.

Snider, too, seemed open to funding alternatives, as he discussed Pinal's lack of serious help on transportation projects from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act. While a handful of Pinal projects have applied for TIGER grant funding, including Maricopa in a push to start the Arizona 347 grade separation project, Halikowski warned that the chances for those funds, too, would be slim.

"I don't want to throw cold water on it... but it's going to be a challenge to get your projects funded by TIGER grants," he said.

According to Halikowski, only \$1.5 billion in TIGER grant funding is available, while more than \$51 billion-worth of projects are angling for a piece of those funds. Maricopa is seeking \$20 million, which would pay for an environmental study and design study, as well as getting construction under way.



Adam Gaub/Maricopa Monitor, Americans for Prosperity Arizona director Tom Jenney speaks during the Oct. 9 Pinal partnership meeting in Gold Canyon.