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JUST FIX THE ROADS PLAN

Pima County has more than 1,200 miles of roads that have been rated Poor or Failed – that’s 2/3 of all the roads. This comes directly from statistics provided by the Pima County Department of Transportation.

And they are getting even worse with each passing day.

Clearly, something has to be done – and done now.

I personally feel addressing our road repair situation is the most important issue facing Pima County today.

The options before us are fraught with roadblocks and dead ends, to use a topical metaphor. They are all time-consuming, complicated, and most likely impossible and futile to attain or even attempt.

At the County level, there is little hope to find adequate and significant monies in our General Fund that could properly address our road repair challenges. Though we should continue to look for unnecessary expenditures, realistically how much money could be taken out of the General Fund for road repairs without disrupting much of Pima County operations?

At the State level, raising the State’s gas tax has an even bleaker future. That would require approval by both the State Legislature and the Governor. Someone close to the Governor told me that during a recent function, someone asked Governor Ducey if he would support raising the State’s gas tax. His response? He said, “Not only no, but Hell no.”

And what is the point of raising the State’s gas tax if the Legislature sweeps it away?

At the Federal level, no immediate action for road repair seems forthcoming and even if there were, how much would slowly drip down to fixing our roads here in Pima County?

Certainly, there are a number of other options out there: a “vehicle miles traveled” tax; a “special district” tax; a “tax at the gas pump in Pima County” tax – and others.

All of these options would require either voter approval or approval by the State Legislature and Governor – or both.

Each of these plans would take a great deal of time to pursue – time our roads and we don’t have.

Further, the prospects of success in enacting any of these options are next to zero – particularly when it comes to dealing with the State Legislature up in Phoenix.

In the meantime, our roads will continue to deteriorate, making road repair that much more costly and that much more difficult.

Our road plan, I believe, is the most fair, makes the most sense, is the most efficient and transparent, and will have the greatest countywide support, as well as the greatest and quickest chance of success.

And we can do it together – now.

Here is our plan:

Our plan begins with the Board of Supervisors immediately repealing the newly enacted Property Tax for Road Repair. This was a bad tax and a bad plan to fix our roads. However, the County had very few choices.

Annually, countywide, this new property tax is estimated to raise barely a little over 19 million dollars for fixing our 800 million to 1 billion dollar road repair problem.

Clearly, a drop in the bucket all paid for on the backs of County property owners, who already feel over-taxed.

Even our County Administrator has acknowledged that at the current rate of using this new property tax for road repair, it would take 35 years to fix our roads, and that's if the roads remain in the very same condition as they are today.

Second – upon repeal of the Property Tax for Road Repair, we propose that the Board of Supervisors pass a countywide, half-cent sales tax. By doing so, this regional sales tax can raise, countywide, over 75 million dollars annually or more than 800 million dollars over the course of 10 years.

Third – we further propose that upon enactment of a countywide half-cent sales tax, that the Board of Supervisors authorize that all revenues generated by the sales tax be directed solely and singularly to the Regional Transportation Authority, and that the RTA has the complete and total direction over the administration of this tax revenue for the singular purpose of fixing our roads – and for fixing our roads only.

That's it – that's our plan.

Now let's look at how it can work and how it can succeed.

The RTA enjoys the universal confidence of Pima County residents. The RTA is an independent, regionally administered transportation-focused entity that has an unprecedented proven track record of success. After 11 plus years, almost 1,000 multi-jurisdictional, multi-modal transportation enhancement and improvement projects designed for greater mobility and capacity have been conducted and completed on-time and under budget by the RTA.

The RTA's process for success has been magnified by its transparent, citizen-driven, and publicly accountable methodology that has visible results in practically every corner of Pima County, including our own Green Valley and Sahuarita.

As further evidence shows, as if any further evidence is even needed, that the RTA has the ability to address road repair issues, just last spring, the State Auditor General issued its findings regarding its financial and operational audit of the RTA's performance – and the RTA passed with flying colors.

The State Legislature mandated this audit, and the RTA received praise and commendation from the very auditors themselves.

Further, with the RTA leading countywide road repair efforts, we can all have confidence that 99% of all tax dollars generated will go directly to road repairs. The other 1 percent will cover the RTA's cost of administering the entire program.

As a former car salesman, I can tell you – now that's a good deal.

Citizen input and oversight can be continued and expanded through the newly created Transportation Advisory Committee.

Pima County, the City of Tucson and all incorporated jurisdictions can also contribute to the development of the RTA's Road Repair Program.

The RTA can be in constant communication with the public and the Board of Supervisors as to the RTA's Road Repair Program's development, with public "dash boards", public hearings and meetings, and many other transparent communication conveyances.

And a very important piece of RTA Road Repair Program must include that all countywide road repair projects be put out to an open and public bid process.

Who knows? Maybe the RTA can include beautification and landscaping plans for our medians and sidewalks.

And finally, the RTA Road Repair Program – funded by a countywide sales tax – must include a "sunset" clause and time limit.

Annual reviews and progress reports until that "sunset" takes effect must be included, too. I would suggest 10 years to "sunset".

The positive benefits of the RTA Road Repair Program include:

- Tax relief by rolling back the current Property Tax for Road Repair just recently enacted.
- Tourists and non-residents of Pima County will contribute and participate in sales tax revenue generation for road repair – not just Pima County residents or property owners alone.
- The sales tax would not tax food, housing, or medication.

Voters overwhelmingly approved the RTA and its mission back in 2006 by a 60 to 40 % margin. I view our plan as just an enhancement and expansion to the original RTA mission and of an already existing tax.

With our plan, the RTA can continue on its mission to complete road capacity and increased mobility enhancements designed to fight congestion throughout our region – and at the same time begin to conquer our deteriorating and failed roads.

Our road repair plan is an investment in ourselves; the countywide sales tax revenue stays wholly in Pima County.

It does not get shipped off to Washington, DC or up to Phoenix, with the forlorn hope that some of our own dollars will eventually trickle back to Pima County someday, maybe.

Pima County money stays in Pima County, to be invested in Pima County.

This plan is not without its challenges.

The biggest and most formidable hurdle that must be cleared if this plan is to succeed is that it requires a 100%, 5 - 0 approval vote by the Board of Supervisors – a daunting task.

That is why I feel that by announcing it today, our plan has been delivered into the public square. Now it can be publicly vetted, analyzed, and discussed in great detail and consideration.

I will be presenting our plan to the newly formed Sales Tax Advisory Committee and to all business and community organizations as well.

I plan to finalize the plan's wording and place it before the Board of Supervisors for a vote in November or early December at the latest.

I implore my fellow Board members to put away our differences and to begin working together today to advance the RTA Road Repair Program – utilizing our concepts rolled out here today – as a platform and model that allow all of us to finally address our road repair needs.

This is not a “Democrat versus Republican” issue.

This is not a “Majority versus Minority” issue.

This is, most certainly, not an “Us versus Them” issue.

This is an “All of us are in this together” issue.

I am fully open to suggestions and concerns – and criticism – from my fellow members of the Board of Supervisors, and I actively seek their input and support.

Here and now, I give them and you my promise and pledge that I will work with each of them in good faith, to seek a workable road repair plan that all of the members of the Board of Supervisors and - most importantly – all of the residents of Pima County can be proud of.