

## [Surprise](#)

### **Experts urge West Valley leaders to address transportation demands**

by **Cecilia Chan** - Sept. 18, 2009 11:20 AM  
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Arizona needs to look for new funding because its traditional sources won't be sufficient in the future to pay for transportation demands, experts told West Valley leaders who were gathered in Surprise.

The state today relies on three revenue streams - the highway-user tax, the half-cent [sales tax](#) and federal funding.

"All three are experiencing unprecedented stresses that we have never seen in modern times," said John McGee, executive director of planning and policy with the Arizona [Department of Transportation](#).

He said the annual collection of fees such as gasoline taxes, motor-carrier taxes and vehicle-license taxes in the Highways Users Revenue Fund, known as HURF, declined in each of the past three years - a 2.7 percent drop in 2008; 7.1 percent in 2009 and a 12 percent for 2010.

McGee spoke at a community meeting last week that presented recommendations from an Arizona Town Hall gathering in Tucson earlier this year. The non-profit Town Hall is a think tank for state leaders to find solutions to critical issues facing Arizona.

About 60 people attended the session at Rio Salado College, including Surprise Mayor Lyn Truitt; Surprise Councilman Skip Hall; Paul Herrmann, executive director of the Sun City Visitors Center; and Sharolyn Hohman, president and chief executive at Southwest Valley Chamber of Commerce.

"We have never seen declines approaching these levels," McGee said, adding that two years ago the state forecast it would collect \$1.6 billion for 2010. Instead, the state is looking at \$1.2 billion.

McGee said underlying factors contributed to HURF's decline such as \$4-a-gallon of gas a year ago. Drivers now are buying more hybrids and cars that can go 35 miles on a gallon of gas, he said.

He said the real-estate market's collapse, the bailout of GM and Chrysler and the emphasis on sustainability provided the "perfect storm" that impacted user fees.

"I do believe the future will look significantly different from the last 50 years," McGee said of the way transportation is funded. He suggested toll roads and sales tax are needed in the future.

Jack Lunsford, president and chief executive of Westmarc, a business and government group, said if people want infrastructure, a stable, predicable revenue source must be in place.

Surprise resident Sabra Van Cleef said transportation needs exist that require attention and that every time there is talk about transportation funding, it all goes for roads.

She said she and other seniors who no longer drive need more public transit.

"We need help now," she said. "I feel like I'm on a tether and can only go as far as my feet (takes me)."

She said a stretch of Bell Road near her home doesn't have sidewalks and she won't cross the thoroughfare because it's too dangerous.

Van Cleef takes the Dial-a-Ride van every Thursday morning to the grocery [store](#) and said the two metro buses that do drive through Surprise don't take her to the restaurants and shopping centers in the city.

"It's pretty hard to get around," said Van Cleef, who predicted the problem will only grow as more baby boomers retire.

The Arizona Town Hall report also cited a need to create sustainable communities by improving connectivity between land-use planning, economic development and transportation.

"We need to change the way we build cities," said speaker Teresa Brice, executive director of Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a non-profit that transforms distressed neighborhoods. "Cities are being developed to make us dependent on cars."

Brice said Arizona residents' dependency on cars helps contribute to increased obesity rates, pollution and takes away from family time.

"We need dedicated funding," Cliff Elkins, a transportation expert and former Surprise councilman. "If you don't have funding, you don't get anywhere."

Elkins said a commuter rail needs to be built, linking the West Valley to the [Phoenix area](#).

## **Recommendations for state's transportation needs**

The 94th Arizona Town Hall, which took place in April, came up with recommendations to address current and future transportation needs in the state.

For a copy of the "From Here to There: Transportation Opportunities for Arizona" report, go to [www.aztownhall.org](http://www.aztownhall.org).

### **FIND FUNDS**

Update fuel tax to reflect inflation, with possible future increase.

Allow HURF money to fund public transit.

Implement statewide development-impact fee.

Encourage private investment in state's [transportation system](#).

Establish toll roads.

## **FORM A COMMISSION**

Educate the public about value of transportation improvements.

Encourage public input on transportation needs.

Identify funding levels and resources.

## **PLAN LAND USE**

Set up permits to require new developments to link to an existing transportation corridor.

Enact state trust-land reform to allow for more efficient growth patterns, infrastructure, siting and land conservation.

## **ENGAGE PRIVATE SECTOR**

Enact state and federal laws to allow for public-private partnerships.

Enact state law to allow for formation of private forms of "design, build and operate" for various transportation methods.

