

Tucson Citizen

Arizona Town Hall recommends higher fuel tax, more planning

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Arizona needs more money, coordinated efforts and planning on transportation, a diverse gathering of community leaders and transportation experts said Wednesday.

A higher fuel tax, the elimination of a transportation sales tax cap for counties and the creation of a statewide panel to guide planning were among the chief recommendations by the biannual Arizona Town Hall's 127 participants from across the state.

Planning is the key, said Town Hall President Tara Jackson. "Some would argue we are already behind," she said.

The group concluded the best way to plan would involve a state-level panel of representatives from cities, counties, tribes, businesses, academia, nonprofits and other stakeholders.

The panel should plan based on the grass-roots needs of communities, a "value-based" approach, the group said.

The plan should recognize economic development and ecological considerations and help shift the state away from dependence on foreign

oil.

The panel would work to eliminate fragmented planning, educate the public and encourage discourse and prioritize needs.

The Town Hall recommends several ways to pay for transportation improvements.

The fuel tax should be adjusted to account for inflation and indexed to inflation to make sure it does not fall behind on the cost of providing services, the group suggested.

"One is to play catch-up, and one is to index for the future," said Si Schorr, a Town Hall participant who represents Pima County on the State Transportation Board.

The fuel tax has not changed since its inception in 1991.

Other suggestions include toll roads with "congestion pricing," which would charge more for people using the highways during high-traffic hours, said James Condo, a Phoenix attorney who led the final session to hammer out amendments to the Town Hall report.

Participants met in four groups Monday and Tuesday at the Doubletree Hotel Tucson at Reid Park, then met as one big group to craft amendments to the draft, which was completed Tuesday evening and posted on the Internet for Town Hall members by midnight. Throughout the day Wednesday the document was evolving.

A final draft will be on the Arizona Town Hall Web site next week, Jackson said.

The final report will be combined with the massive background report and distributed widely, Jackson said.

She thinks the goals are achievable, because they were crafted by a broad array of community leaders and experts. Those experts and leaders can

now help make the suggestions happen, she said.

"Little of this can be done tomorrow, but I don't think any of this is pie in the sky," Jackson said. "These are not people prone to pie-in-the-sky ideas."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

On the Web

Arizona Town Hall Web site:
www.aztownhall.org