

Canyon County legislators to continue fight for I-84 funding

- By LIS STEWART lstewart@idahopress.com
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BOISE — Despite the Senate **killing a proposed transportation funding bill**, and that there are only days left in the legislative session, Canyon County legislators are not giving up on getting money to fix Interstate 84 between Nampa and Caldwell.

Legislators were inundated with calls, emails and letters Thursday, a day after the Senate voted 15-20 against a \$320 million transportation funding plan that would have freed up an additional \$17 million for roads and bridges and paved the way to widen I-84 between Nampa and Caldwell.

The 2C senators all voted and spoke in favor of the bill.

“This is a critical issue for every single one of the Canyon County legislators,” said Sen. Patti Anne Lodge, R-Huston.

The Caldwell Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to legislators Thursday expressing disappointment at the failure to pass a transportation funding bill.

“There are critical improvements that need to be made to I-84,” the letter states. “This stretch of road remains inadequate and over capacity for the more than 40,000 vehicles that use it daily. Resident commute times have doubled over the last few years as Canyon County has seen tremendous population growth.”

The letter is signed by 21 business leaders, including Crookham Company CEO George Crookham, College of Idaho President Charlotte Borst and Idaho Press-Tribune Publisher Matt Davison.

“The Legislature's practice of ‘Kicking the can’ down the road is simply a recipe for disaster and will directly impact economic growth in our area and the state of Idaho,” the letter continues.

Representatives and senators have been meeting for weeks on how to get transportation funding approved before the session is over. In a press conference Wednesday with the county's House delegation, Nampa Republican Robert Anderst told reporters that they are still trying to find a way to fund roads before the session ends.

"We do not want to adjourn without a transportation bill," Anderst said.

Although the press conference included only House members, Lodge said this is an effort by all members of the Canyon County delegation. It is the first time she recalls all of them coming together for an issue.

“This is the top priority I’ve ever seen us all working on,” Lodge said.

Lodge said if more legislators from Meridian and Boise voted for the bill, it would have passed. Those from Ada County who voted for the bill include Marv Hogedorn, R-Meridian, Fred Martin, R-Boise, Janie Ward-Engelking, D-Boise and Chuck Winder, R-Boise.

The bill seemed to find its downfall from those who were against taking on more debt. The funding plan was mainly based around the GARVEE bonding program, which would effectively be another debt to pay off.

"This time we're seeking to borrow the money, money not necessarily for maintenance but for new construction. It's for more lane miles to maintain when we can't maintain the miles we have now," said Sen. Jim Guthrie, R-Inkom. "It's the path of least resistance, but not necessarily the best path and certainly not the only path."

Caldwell Chamber of Commerce letter

March 23, 2017

Dear Legislator

We are disappointed that the Idaho State Legislature failed to substantially address the issue of transportation funding this year.

This continued inaction is crippling the economy of Canyon County and choking future growth. As some of largest employers and taxpayers in our county, we see the direct damage that this inaction is causing.

The GARVEE bonding program should revert back to the original proposal made by Governor Kempthorne-- meaning freeway expansion all the way to Caldwell.

There are critical improvements that need to be made to I-84. This stretch of road remains inadequate and over capacity for the more than 40,000 vehicles that use it daily. Resident commute times have doubled over the last few years as Canyon County has seen tremendous population growth. This brings increased gasoline and vehicle maintenance costs as well.

The legislature must begin to look to the future when it comes to transportation funding. The communities in motion report by COMPASS estimates that by 2040 the Treasure Valley will be home to 1 million residents and that the majority of commercial and residential expansion will take place in Canyon County.

The Legislature's practice of "Kicking the can" down the road is simply a recipe for disaster and will directly impact economic growth in our area and the state of Idaho.

It is incumbent upon you to pass meaningful legislation on transportation funding—funding that expands I-84 all the way to Caldwell—before the 2017 legislative session is complete.

Sincerely,

Betsy Hunsicker, CEO, West Valley Medical Center

George Crookham, CEO, Crookham Company

Scott Gipson, President, The Caxton Printers

Jim Thomssen, In-Coming Chairman of the Board, Caldwell Chamber of Commerce

John McGee, President, The McGee Group

Gregg Alger, Owner, Huston Vineyards

Mark Schmitt, Owner, D & B Supply

Gary Weaver, Owner, Farmer's Insurance

Brett Bausher, Owner, Canyon Small Animal Hospital

Gary Multanen, Owner, Best Bath Systems

Bob Jenkins, Owner, Valli Information Systems

Bill Moad, Simplot Transportation,

Stacy Ward, General Manager, Best Western Plus Caldwell Inn & Suites

Bob Carpenter, Owner, Carpenter Screen Printing & Embroidery

Dr. Charlotte Borst, President, The College of Idaho

Nate McKnight, Plant Manager, Darigold

Kim Deugan, ED, Advocates Against Family Violence

Mike Durning, Chamber of Commerce Board Member

Matt Davison, Idaho Press Tribune

Sam Pauley, Dennis Dillon, Dodge, Chrysler, Jeep, Ram

Theresa Hardin, Executive Director, Caldwell Chamber of Commerce

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