Concerns raised over inadequate transportation funding

Will our roads in the valley be able to accommodate future growth?

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(Photo: Paul Boehlke/KTVB)

BOISE -- By the year 2040, the population in the Treasure Valley is expected to increase from 650,000 people to well over one million. But a shortfall in state transportation funding is presenting major roadblock when it comes to keeping up with the increased traffic flow.

“Your current commute probably will double based on our current estimates of what transportation projects are planned to build over the next 25 years,” said Matt Stoll, executive director for Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, or COMPASS. “Expansion projects that would be necessary to deal with anticipated congestion, but also the public transportation system that would help move people around the valley.”

When the Idaho Legislature increased the gas tax and registration fees in the 2015 session, it also established a policy that those funds could only be used for maintenance of the existing roadways -- not building new ones.
“It’s kind of like having a heart attack, you’re having the plaque building up as far as the congestion and eventually it’s going to start affecting the economy,” said Stoll.

COMPASS says in Ada and Canyon counties alone there's a transportation funding shortfall of over $150 million per year. Idaho and Mississippi are the only two states without a dedicated funding stream for public transportation.

“So, if you wait until the year 2040 when you’ve got over a million people in the valley, it’s going to be too late and you’re going to be in the constant catch up mode,” said Stoll.

As it stands, COMPASS is left pursuing competitive federal grants to help fund roadway expansion projects. But ideally, it would like the chance to ask citizens directly whether they'd be willing to take on a local option sales tax to fund specific roadway projects.

“So, basically we take to the citizens and say here is what we plan to build there’s roadways, public transportation, whatever, and ask them to vote on it and say whether they’re willing to increase that sales tax to accomplish that over a specified time period,” said Stoll.