Compass' legislative priorities include local option tax, cellphone ban

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Northbound traffic remains backed up along Eagle Road south of Fairview Avenue in Meridian, even as lights are green, Tuesday, June 25, 2019.
Brian Myrick / Idaho Press

The Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho will be working to gather more state and local revenue to pay for transportation projects to help cut a $235 million funding shortfall in Ada and Canyon counties.
The regional planning agency, known as Compass, released its legislative priorities Monday. The goals include:

- An increase in the state motor fuels excise tax
- Providing counties and cities authority over their sales taxes (otherwise known as the local option)
- Dedicated funding for public transportation, cycling and pedestrian pathways
- And a statewide statute to ban handheld cellphone use while driving.

Compass is also supporting implementing a mileage-based fee structure for heavy vehicles travelling on state and local roadways, giving municipalities the power to create High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, and matching the state fuels tax to the rate of inflation.

At least one of Compass’ priorities is similar to a recently passed Treasure Valley law — Meridian’s ban on using handheld electronic devices while in a traffic lane.

Growth is at the center of many of Compass’ positions. The organization recently estimated that, by the year 2050, 1,075,000 people will be living in Ada and Canyon counties, up from the current regional total of roughly 712,200.

With that growth, Compass foresees a greater demand for public transportation and even more strain on infrastructure throughout the Treasure Valley.

According to Compass’ legislative position document, “Idaho’s current transportation funding level remains inadequate to address the state’s needs. State and local transportation entities still face critical funding shortfalls for maintenance and expansion projects.”