

KDOT unveils task force, seeks public input

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Increasing costs of fuel, asphalt and other materials has sent the Kansas Department of Transportation searching for more sources of funding.

KDOT hosted the second of its eight public meetings Friday in which it introduced its new task force, Kansas Transportation Leveraging Investments in Kansas, and sought input from local residents on the state's future in the industry.

KDOT presented numerous ideas to help with the projected \$1.5 billion per year funding gap in state transportation projects over the next 10 years.

"I kind of like the idea of putting a sales tax on gasoline rather than the so-many cents per gallon," Ellis County Commission Chairman Dennis Pfannenstiel said. He also supports increasing registration fees for large trucks.

Pfannenstiel was one of about 75 local and state government leaders and industry leaders who attended the meeting.

Other ideas for additional funding were increasing the motor fuels tax, property taxes, all vehicle registration fees and fees for developers of building projects, which require new state infrastructure.

New revenue for state projects could come from gambling fees, new toll roads, taxing either vehicle weight or miles driven by an individual, or increasing the local match requirement for projects.

"The worst idea, I think, is to push more to the local people," Pfannenstiel said.

Don Hineman, Republican candidate for state representative in the 118th District, agreed saying that the more local funding governments have to come up with, the more property tax residents would have to pay.

"It's pretty common for the county ... to have a mill levy of over 200 mills," Hineman said of western Kansas. "Most of the folks from Johnson County and Sedgwick County just can't identify with that.

"We cannot afford to raise property taxes much more. We need other avenues of funding."

Kansas T-LINK will evaluate the responses from this month's public meetings to decide if any of the new or existing revenues can be utilized for more sources of funding.

Other concerns were raised about how western Kansas' highway and bridge projects can compete with those in urban areas like Kansas City and Wichita.

"We're possibly looking at for economically depressed areas or areas that may not grow as fast, maybe they can get some extra points," said Chris Herrick, director of planning and development with KDOT. "Another thing we're doing is we're putting projects in funding categories, so \$5 million projects compete against \$5 million projects."

KDOT also is discussing setting the local match for state projects proportional to the revenue base of the community. Hineman said it would be unreasonable to base the amount local governments put forth on a project on the population base.

"We do have a low population density out here, which means we have more miles per capita," Hineman said. "On any traffic count or revenue basis, we're going to lose out."

KDOT has proposed offering incentives to local governments to close bridges which are in need of major repair or replacement. However, since farmers and local business people who would be affected by those bridge closures wouldn't be seeing the incentive money, most of those in attendance didn't support the idea.