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Sales tax may be used for road project

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LAWRENCEVILLE - Officials want to earmark \$61 million from the county's new sales tax funds for the extension of Sugarloaf Parkway to Ga. Highway 316.

A list of about \$92 million for major road projects was presented Friday to a citizen's committee set to recommend how the transportation portion of the 2009 special purpose local option sales tax will be spent.

Next month, the list will be set and commissioners will consider the earmarks in June.

"Sugarloaf is the most major project in this county," Deputy Transportation Director Alan Chapman said of the project, which took two-thirds of the apportioned major roads category. "It ultimately is going to provide so much relief for state route 20 and other roads."

Chapman pointed out that another \$10 million has been set aside for right of way purchases that could protect land for future projects, including a second extension to Sugarloaf Parkway to take the route north to Peachtree Industrial Boulevard.

"Protective buys are an important part of what we do," he said, adding that about 60 percent of the second extension's route was preserved by the state over the past two decades for the now-defunct Northern Arc project. Waiting for development, he said, would not only cost the county more money but also impact people's lives.

It also allows the county to seek state and federal funds for projects if officials are willing to put their own money forward for some work, such as \$9 million in design and right of way work leading to the recent state and federal funded \$150 million reconstruction of Interstate 85 and Ga. Highway 316.

"This will give us some flexibility to make some of these projects happen," Chapman said.

Also included in the major roads proposal list was \$1 million each for the design of new interchanges over I-85 for Jimmy Carter Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road, major projects from two of the county's community improvement districts. The third CID could receive \$2 million for two parallel road projects to clear traffic on U.S. Highway 78.

Because of promises of additional funding from city leaders in Lawrenceville and Grayson, officials included money to consider extensions to Bennett Road in Grayson and Nash Street in the county seat.

"Seed money" for design or land purchases for widenings of Braselton Highway, Hamilton Mill Road, Pleasant Hill Road, Duluth Highway, Buford Drive, Five Forks Trickum Road and Cruse Road were also included.

With more money for Duluth Highway, Braselton Highway, Buford Drive and Hamilton Mill Road projects and additional West Pike Street and Auburn Road/Jim Moore Road in a second tier project list, many of the county's major road projects were left off the funding list.

From Buford Highway to Ga. 316, dozens of widening projects remained without funding, as well as proposed extensions to Beaver Run Road, Oakbrook Parkway, Ronald Reagan Parkway, Satellite Boulevard, Willow Trail

Parkway and the second phase of the Sugarloaf extension.

Also left unfunded were a connector road to Georgia Gwinnett College over Ga. Highway 316, interchanges at Ga. 316 and Ga. Highway 20 and Collins Hill Road, which have faced state funding issues, and a proposed interchange at U.S. Highway 78 and Ga. Highway 124.

Chapman said there were a total of more than \$2.1 billion in needs identified through the county's transportation planning process. The proposed funding list was for the highest priority items.

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