
CIDs agree: Big need for road funds

01/31/2007 -

By Arielle Kass

Staff Writer

arielle.kass@gwinnettdaily.com

DULUTH — An alliance of local community improvement districts reiterated the importance of increased transportation funding Tuesday.

The 11 metropolitan Atlanta CIDs, which met at the Gwinnett Place Marriott, discussed three funding options that would help eliminate shortfalls that might cause some transportation projects to be scrapped.

But a resolution the alliance asked the individual revitalization groups to pass stopped short of endorsing any one plan.

"It's a mess," Cumberland CID Chairman Tad Leithhead said. "It's extremely complicated."

Joe Allen, executive director of the Gwinnett Place CID, said one of the main focuses of the CIDs is on transportation. Without improved transportation, he said, shoppers will not come to revitalized areas and businesses won't thrive.

That CID is promoting a plan to change the Interstate 85 interchange with Pleasant Hill Road into a single-point interchange. The Highway 78 CID is expected to let a median project for the road in April and the Gwinnett Village CID will soon begin landscaping interchanges to beautify the area. The alliance's resolution calls for support of solutions that would let areas vote for transportation projects. The state is projecting a \$200 billion shortfall on transportation projects through 2035, Georgia DOT Commissioner Harold Linnenkohl said Monday.

Leithhead told the CID leaders that a Georgians for Better Transportation plan that would roll back the fuel tax in favor of a statewide sales tax has been put on hold pending a legislative effort to overhaul the tax code, something he said would be considered in 2008.

A suggestion by the Metropolitan Atlanta Chamber of Commerce to allow counties to band together and vote to increase the amount of money spend on transportation remains, Leithhead said.

He said there is no political enthusiasm for increasing the state's gas tax, and that as alternate fuels increase and cars get better gas mileages, the fuel tax will bring in less revenue anyway.

As it stands now, the state's constitution mandates that transportation

funding from the gas tax be used on roads and bridges, he said. A new proposal might allow transit or other funding.

"The legislature is actively discussing the issue," he said. "In the past, it's fallen on deaf ears. There is a sense of urgency that something needs to be done, not only if we want to stay competitive, but if we want to keep up with our own growth."