

Opinion

Public Works Week perfect time to celebrate transportation successes

Sure, it might not be a holiday on par with the Fourth of July or New Years Eve, but as National Public Works Week approaches, from May 18 to 24, it's a good time to celebrate one of our region's most monumental transportation successes, the Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority.

PPRTA was formed when voters in Colorado Springs, Manitou Springs, Green Mountain Falls and El Paso County approved a 1 percent sales tax during November 2004 to address infrastructure and transit needs in the region. The tax revenue is divided into three categories: 55 percent goes toward capital improvements, 35 percent goes toward maintenance and 10 percent toward transit. It is difficult to underestimate how important this lifeline of funding has become to the City of Colorado Springs.

Here are just a few examples.

The Cimarron Street Bridge was included in a designated list of capital improvement projects approved by voters, but when a hole in the concrete deck was reported on Aug. 9, 2006, the timeline had to be accelerated. Construction of the new bridge started last October and will be completed by late August. Yet, the Cimarron Street Bridge will partially reopen to traffic in just a couple weeks — before the summer tourists arrive.

Not only is dedicated funding critical so transportation projects don't have to compete with other services (such as police, fire and parks) for constrained general funds, but also so we can secure federal and state grants.

For example, during 2007 a \$1.68 million match from the PPRTA led to a state grant of \$6.32 million for the purchase of 19 FrontRange Express commuter buses. Thanks to dedicated PPRTA funds the city is literally bringing in millions of additional grant dollars each year that otherwise would not be available to Colorado Springs.

Colorado's freeze-thaw environment is especially difficult on road surfaces and last year's winter tested us. Thanks to an emergency loan from PPRTA maintenance reserves and the yearly maintenance allocation, crews filled 33,287 potholes on city streets and the city was able to resurface 34 miles of damaged roadway.

As promised, the city commits the same level of effort (general fund dollars)

for maintenance efforts that existed before the PPRTA. During 2007, PPRTA maintenance money allowed the city to:

- Reconstruct concrete curbs, gutters and sidewalks along 44 miles of repaved roadways and make \$1.4 million in high priority repairs.
- Make repairs to 38 bridges.
- Work on 18 roadway safety and traffic operations projects designed to reduce congestion and crashes.
- Install 16 new and replaced traffic signals (averaging 35 years old) and replace 5,846 traffic signal light bulbs



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funding from the PPRTA has made our public transportation systems truly regional.

Mountain Metropolitan Transit provides services in the Pikes Peak region including the City of Colorado Springs, El Paso County and Manitou Springs. PPRTA-supported services include fixed-route, FrontRange Express, Free Downtown Shuttle and Metro

Mobility.

During 2007, the PPRTA purchased seven replacement Mountain Metro buses. During 2008, PPRTA money is ensuring continued operation of FREX,

bility options.

City staff continues working on the initial voter-approved list of projects the funding is allowed to support. Of the priority "A" list approved by voters, 7 percent are on-going, 36 percent of the city's PPRTA projects are finished and another 28 percent are under way.

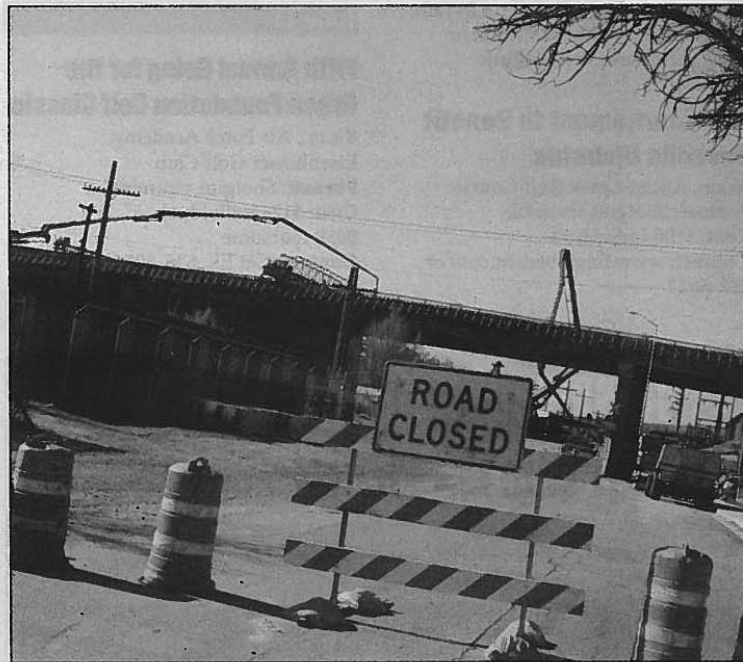
Last year, the city completed a congestion and maintenance project on Union Boulevard between Pikes Peak and Constitution avenues (using tire rubber asphalt) as well as safety projects at Academy/Fountain and Academy/Pikes Peak. Fillmore now sports the region's first side-by-side triple left turn lane (nearby safety improvements at Fillmore and El Paso will include road realignment, new curbs, gutters, sidewalks, pedestrian ramps, and traffic signal improvements during 2008).

Construction of the grade-separated interchange bridging Austin Bluffs Parkway over Union Boulevard is on target for November completion. The Constitution/Circle intersection will be improved to reduce traffic congestion and accidents and construction will begin later this year on the first phase of improvements to the city's portion of the Woodmen Road Corridor. This phase of construction will make Woodmen six lanes from Campus Drive to Bell Drive and include a grade-separated interchange at Woodmen and Academy Boulevard.

Design will continue for Milton E. Proby Parkway, a project to build a new limited access east-west expressway between Academy and Powers boulevards, south of Drennan Road. And, design will begin for two adjacent Vincent Drive projects: an east-west traffic flow project extending Vincent Drive to connect Nevada Avenue with Dublin Boulevard and replacement of Vincent Drive Bridge at Cottonwood Creek.

It seems appropriate that the theme for this year's National Public Works Week is "The Future is Now," since excellent transportation infrastructure and services are essential to two of the city's long-term strategic goals, economic vitality and quality of life. With four years of PPRTA success under our belt, it's indeed time to celebrate the future of Colorado Springs.

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Construction of the Cimarron Street Bridge is scheduled to be completed by late August.

with brighter energy-saving LED bulbs, including 1,000 pedestrian "Walk/Don't Walk" signals.

■ Install large, internally-lit street signs at four major intersections and the replacement of 847 street name signs with larger-lettered signs more easily read by the public.

■ Mark 1,119 "school" legends, 600 long-lasting school crosswalks and 2,153 miles of street lane striping.

In addition to functional and safer transportation infrastructure, dedicated

three new Mountain Metro routes, the purchase of two downtown shuttles and nine replacement paratransit (Metro Mobility) vans, five vans for paratransit service expansion, and the installation of "Talking Signs" to assist riders with visual impairments.

PPRTA money also support city-unaffiliated human service providers, such as Silver Key and Amblicab, which are now able to receive local money for transportation services for community members with limited, or no other, mo-

Photo by Rob Lattner