

Mid-valley resident has many questions on CV Link benefits

Over the last year or so I have read many letters in *The Desert Sun* on the pros and cons of building and maintaining the CV Link. To be perfectly transparent, I am completely against what I consider a \$100 million dollar boondoggle.

Having said that, I would ask the decision makers (as I or any other of the residents of the valley will not have a say) to consider my reasons for coming to the conclusion I have reached.

If this project were to be financed with municipal bonds that would be repaid with our tax dollars, and required a vote of the people, I firmly believe it would never receive the necessary votes to pass. In that case, the people would have spoken.

The nearest possible point of entry to the wash for me, and those around me, for the Link is at Cook Street near Palm Desert High School, which is about two miles from my home. (Will the "link" bridge Cook?) If there will be access there, or for that matter at any entry point, there will need to be adequate and safe parking.

The maximum safe range of my golf cart, and I suspect most of those in the valley, is eight miles. Therefore, once I reach the wash at Cook, I would only be able to take the link three miles in either direction, and where does that take me? How can any reasonable person believe there will be much use by drivers of golf carts on the Link?

If I were going to walk on the Link (I'm too old to run) I either must walk the two miles to get to the wash or drive there in my car or golf cart.

There have been many



Tom Wells

comments and projected estimates as to the increase in tourism and the accompanying increase in revenue that will come to the valley, thanks to the Link. If this is true, and I am skeptical, where will these people stay? Every hotel and rental property is fairly well-booked in the season, and most of the rest of the year it would be too hot to utilize the Link. Does that mean that the influx of tourists will have stay in new hotel rooms, or newly built homes. If so, what does that do to current water usage?

If the valley governments have \$100 million dollars to spend, why not give it away in the form of scholarships, or build decent low-income housing, or put that money toward repairing the Salton Sea, or _____ (you fill in the blank as there are untold numbers of better uses for this money).

I hope the decision makers consider the points I have made. At the very least, they should consider building a portion, say 10 miles, and see how much it is used for a couple of years first. I know governments don't have to justify expenditures like a private business must, but maybe, just maybe, the Link should be the exception to that norm.

Email Tom Wells of Palm Desert at twells3@dc.rr.com.

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5-13-15

VALLEY VOICE

CV Link's critics should join effort to resolve issues

It is difficult as an elected official to question an elected official of a neighboring jurisdiction but I witnessed something in the city of Rancho Mirage that compels me to do so.

Ironically, the same day that Mayor Dana Hobart sent out a long email criticizing the CV Link project I witnessed a terrible bike accident in the city of Rancho Mirage: A 55-year-old bicyclist, Mario P., had been riding along the Highway 111 sidewalk. When it came to an end he took a horrible fall.

First responders were efficient, slowing traffic, rushing Mario to Desert Regional Hospital with severe, but fortunately not life-threatening, injuries and then quickly cleaning the blood off the sidewalk and street.

Mayor Hobart and the City Council of Rancho Mirage have made it abundantly clear they do not want CV Link coming through their city. The city requested certain routes removed from the project. Most of them were along the country clubs and CVAG accommodated their requests. At a recent workshop held at Mayor Hobart's request, he spoke and questioned CVAG on the operation and maintenance costs, quoting excessive and incorrect numbers. At that same workshop a group of private landowners with residences on a public trail testified CV Link would disrupt their use of the trail. Soon thereafter the City



Jan Harnik

nance funding plan. Additionally, at Thursday's council meeting the Rancho Mirage City Council passed yet another resolution barring CV Link from traversing Highway 111 or Bob Hope Drive. The Rancho Mirage City Council knows full well that they are blocking all conceivable routes through their city, seemingly in an effort to derail the project.

Mayor Hobart continually asserts he is not opposed to CV Link despite ongoing efforts that indicate otherwise, including asking the executive committee of CVAG to stop work on the project. If Mayor Hobart is true to his word, I ask that he state a route that would be acceptable through the city of Rancho Mirage. Let's have a rational and reasonable discussion dealing with operations and maintenance costs.

More than \$75 million towards the \$100 million construction cost has been raised without asking Coachella Valley cities for one dime. CVAG is working on grants and funding for the additional \$25 million.

Council took action opposing the CV Link from passing through the Butler Abrams Trail (a public trail). They also opposed connecting and providing access to the popular community resource, the Rancho Mirage library.

At CVAG, Mayor Hobart testified that "operations and maintenance charges, over the course of decades, comes up to hundreds of millions of dollars." Despite myriad and substantiated evidence to the contrary, he continues to maintain and state these overinflated figures and despite Mayor Hobart's assertions to the contrary, no CVAG committee has reviewed, considered nor taken any action on an operations and mainte-

Let's all work together to make this a valuable Coachella Valley asset, not take actions to stand in the way. Let's provide a safe route for bicyclists, pedestrians and low-speed electric vehicles.

If we build the CV Link up to Rancho Mirage's borders there will be many more accidents like Mario's when users are forced to take whatever route they can through Rancho Mirage. Let's not force them to do that.

Jan Harnik is a member of the Palm Desert City Council, chairs the Coachella Valley Association of Governments executive committee and serves on CVAG's Transportation Committee. Email her at jharnik@dc.rr.com.

YOUR VOICE

Better uses for money

Why is Supervisor John Benoit pushing so hard for the CV Link? What does he gain if this boondoggle goes through?

The entire project just smells bad! With all the things our valley needs why is this so important?

With the drought, the Salton Sea, crime stopping and many more important items on our agenda, a pathway for trash, vagrants, potential crime and other costly waste seems unimportant. Wouldn't the amount of money this will cost be better spent elsewhere?

John Pfeiffer, Palm Desert

Road work needed

Mr. Benoit has called out critics of the CV Link saying

they are "uninformed and inflammatory." He goes on to say, "Building roadways is expensive, MAINTAINING them is far less expensive. But doing so periodically is critical so you don't have to fix major problems later."

"Maintaining" them is far less expensive? Really? Has he driven some of his county roads lately? Or is he transported about on some magic carpet? Because last I checked the county of Riverside needed some serious road maintenance. Rancho Mirage maintains its roads on a regular schedule!

Here's a suggestion for our county supervisor and avid cyclists that really, really want this government "boondoggle." The county, and the 8 other cities in our valley, with their

massive pension and health liabilities, should first maintain the roads within their own sphere of influence, before adding the CV Link.

Jens Mueller, Cathedral City

Too many questions

It is said that your life can't go according to plan if you have no plan. It's also been said that when you make a plan make sure you see it through to its fullest. The CV Link is a great idea at first sight except what happens next? The first costs were projected in the \$53 million to \$77 million dollar range. Now we are at about \$100 million.

What about the following? 1. Safety: Fence, cameras every mile and emergency phone boxes. 2. Ongoing mainte-

nance: Pathway and electric, etc. 3. Crime: Vandals, graffiti, robbers, muggings, abductions, insurance, etc. 4. Costs: How high with they really rise? 5. Responsibilities: County, Valley Task Force (oversight committee), or cities?

You read a book from beginning to end, but when you have a plan you start with the end and work your way back. Shame on you for not doing the entire plan for the public's due diligence. As of now it is a bridge to nowhere.

Robert F. Sylk, La Quinta

More than he deserves

Re: "Killer 'living the dream,'" May 10

Ernesto Martinez is a convicted police killer. He will continue to kill and the only

Not following blindly

Sections of the CVAG Status reports cited by Dana Hobart in support of Rancho Mirage's opposition to the CV Link proposal read like a chapter of *Transparency in Government* by Nancy Pelosi: "First you have to pass it and then you will find out what's in it." Our officials bothered to find out what was in it and question what was missing. The reports appear to have been intentionally misleading. The council's position echoes the voices of Rancho Mirage residents who do not believe CV Link offers any benefit to the community.

Rancho Mirage is perhaps the only city in California that is 100 percent free of debt and operates within its annual budget. It's not an accident; our leaders recognize that money they commit to projects belongs to the taxpayers. It is not theirs to finance a legacy of their political achievements. They epitomize honest and responsible governance.

Would any of you or Jan Harnik blindly invest your personal funds and rest your financial futures in a project without vetting the fine print and seeking answers to the missing pieces? Neither would we!

Rob Sharrow, Rancho Mirage

Face the issues

Re: "CV Link's critics should join effort to resolve issues," Valley Voice, May 13

Jan Harnik pushed hard on her agenda for building the CV Link without doing a cost study for future operations and maintenance expenses, and she mightily criticized Rancho Mirage Mayor Dana Hobart, when, at a CVAG CV Link workshop, "He spoke and questioned CVAG on the operation and maintenance costs, quoting excessive and incorrect numbers." He raised the issue and she doesn't want to face it.

What stinks is this: Jan Harnik wrote, "No CVAG committee has reviewed, considered, nor taken any action on an operations and maintenance funding plan." This is astounding! She is admitting that she has not reviewed nor considered a funding plan. Why on Earth is Jan Harnik, chair of the CVAG Executive Committee, pushing so hard for a CV Link when she is telling us she has no idea of the ongoing maintenance and operations costs for this venture?

It appears Jan Harnik is part of the "We have the money so let's spend it on something" crowd at CVAG who have obviously not done their homework nor the thorough research that Mayor Dana Hobart has done. Mr. Hobart is finding it difficult to shine the light of day on the facts about the ultimate costs of the CV Link.

DeeAnn Madsen, Rancho Mirage

cycling opportunities for riders with disabilities, this project is high on my list of something that is not only desirable but also needed for riders who traverse our roads four inches off the ground. Following the death of a hand-cyclist in January 2015 (which was followed by another death of a bicyclist in February) my concerns, it would seem, are well-founded.

Recalling an incident that occurred a few years back where a double amputee veteran and paracyclist was hit by a car in Palm Springs while waiting at a corner resulting in the destruction of his prosthesis, the ability to ride through our valley with significantly greater safety isn't something that is a luxury, it is a necessity.

The CV Link and the efforts of all cycling organizations that promote cycling safety are to be commended for their efforts. The CV Link isn't just trail of inconvenience, it's a movement to create greater safety and recreational opportunities for our valley - end to end.

Judy A. May, regional director, Incight, Palm Desert

We need CV Link's 'vibe'

Ms. Harnik, thank you so much for your support of the CV Link.

As a cyclist, I have been looking forward to the Link for years and am very alarmed at Rancho Mirage's opposition. They should be ashamed of themselves.

What I smell is the influence of some very moneyed political supporters in Rancho Mirage with a NIMBY attitude taking priority over Rancho Mirage's "common people" and those of the rest of the valley. Keep publicly calling them out until they give us a reasonable route through their city!

Don't they realize the "vibe" something like that will give the valley and how good it will be for tourism and cross-pollination among our cities?

Paula Matos, La Quinta

A different path

The Kern River Parkway was created in 1976 and runs for 30 miles along the Kern River bed.

The Parkway has attracted homeless who have set up encampments. Many of the homeless have been hitting the runners and joggers up for food and money, which has discouraged use of the parkway.

The result: Use of the parkway by joggers and walkers has declined and it now requires full-time police patrols seven days a week.

Jim de Boom, Rancho Mirage

Rancho Mirage should pitch in

I am so ashamed of my City Council. Is the Rancho Mirage council now to be known as the bullies of the valley? Is it our turn to have the negative spotlight turned on us?

While I appreciate Mayor Dana Hobart "informing" his electorate about CV Link, shouldn't his blast email have given all sides of the discussion and contained more accurate information?

Yes, I support CV Link. It will be a game changer for the valley. We already attract lots of golfers, tennis players, festival attendees, and more. But we also attract tons of cyclists, folks who come here to relax and, yes, cycle.

Many major resorts, including the Westin in Rancho Mirage, rent bicycles to their guests. Where are they to suggest their guests ride? The major highways (111 and 74) have been the scene of many accidents, some deadly.

Mayor Hobart, stop being a bully. It's time to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.

Susie Harvey, Rancho Mirage

Opening riding opportunities

I have followed, with great interest, the letters regarding the CV Link. As the director of a program that provides

...ey Veatch
MERITUS MEMBER

Hank Plante
COMMUNITY MEMBER

Gloria Franz
COMMUNITY MEMBER

VALLEY VOICE

CV Link 'breakup' would be better for valley's cities

Except for bragging rights, where is the "magic" in creating a continuous CV Link pathway that connects the cities of our valley? How many citizens of Coachella are going to use it to travel to Palm Springs, and vice versa? It seems that the 50-mile concept would primarily benefit a relatively small segment of the resident and visiting population interested in long-distance bicycle riding and hard-core exercise.

Our forward-thinking community leaders are looking to provide an amenity that encourages tourism and exercise, and prepares the valley for expanded use of electric vehicles. But why does it need to link the cities?

Recent controversies have demonstrated that some cities will not accept the imposition of the CV Link onto their already congested roads. For privacy reasons, overlaying the path onto or near already built-out residential areas is also not acceptable to some cities. Some cities feel left out of the project entirely.

As proposed, the CV Link would be mostly atop the levee, which is an easy line to draw on a map and it accomplishes the goal of "linking" cities, but again, for what purpose? Additional money would be needed in the future to extend pathways into our cities to make the CV Link truly relevant.

Effective and well-used pathways deliver people where they NEED and WANT



Jeri Barry

Let's abandon the idea of a single, continuous CV Link needlessly extending down the backbone of the valley in favor of separate "links" in each city. Revise the name of the project to "CV Links" (with an "s") to represent a series of separate inner city "links" that deliver users where they actually want to go.

Where possible, long sections could be included to accommodate those who want to travel farther distances for exercise purposes. If improved health is truly a goal, then shorter, less intimidating, community-driven pathways are much more likely to encourage additional people to get out and to exercise.

CVAG already has a plan that provides options for future NEV routes in the valley. That "Neighborhood Electric Vehicle (NEV) Plan" is on the CVAG website (www.CVAG.org). This report addresses each city in detail and provides a perfect foundation for the creation of individual city "links." The groundwork for CV Links has already been done.

to go — grocery stores, schools, work, restaurants, entertainment venues, shopping and other entities within their own communities. If destinations are worthwhile, more people will be inclined to walk, bike or abandon their car in favor of a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle (NEV).

Each city has very different objectives, challenges and budgets. East valley residents need safe routes that deliver adults to work and kids to school. Other cities need connections between hotels, restaurants and entertainment venues. Each city should be allowed to create a network of internal paths that will answer its specific goals. Also, cities should only accept pathways they can afford to maintain and secure.

Apparently, the "NEV Plan" is intended for implementation after the CV Link is built. But that's backwards. Why not re-direct the already pledged CV Link funds to individual cities NOW for the development of the NEV Plan and the incorporation of existing city bike and pedestrian trails. THEN, if warranted, link the city links together.

The \$75 million in pledged funds would probably go further to re-configure and enhance existing streets and paths than it would cost to build a brand new concrete CV Link roadway on the levee.

Jeri Barry is a resident of Palm Springs. Email her at desertjeri@dc.rr.com

NEWS ONLINE AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Shooting suspect in custody after daylong search

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2nd CV Link path option rejected

Rancho Mirage councilors worry about safety, impact on homes

By Sherry Barkas
The Desert Sun

There will be no CV Link on Highway 111 or Bob Hope Drive in the city of Rancho Mirage, council members said on Thursday — a decision applauded by the dozen or so residents in the audience.

The action, however, leaves the question of where should the link go in Rancho Mirage.

"We don't want to be naysayers," Mayor Dana Hobart said. "We're saying, keep looking. If we can find something acceptable to us, fine."

Thursday's decision follows the April 16 rejection of proposals by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments to build the \$100 million link near the Rancho Mirage Public Library, where the city has plans to build an observatory, or along the Butler-Abrams Trail — one of the few horse trails left in the city.

Highway 111 and Bob Hope Drive present traffic and safety issues along with concerns about the impact on area homes and businesses, council members and residents said.

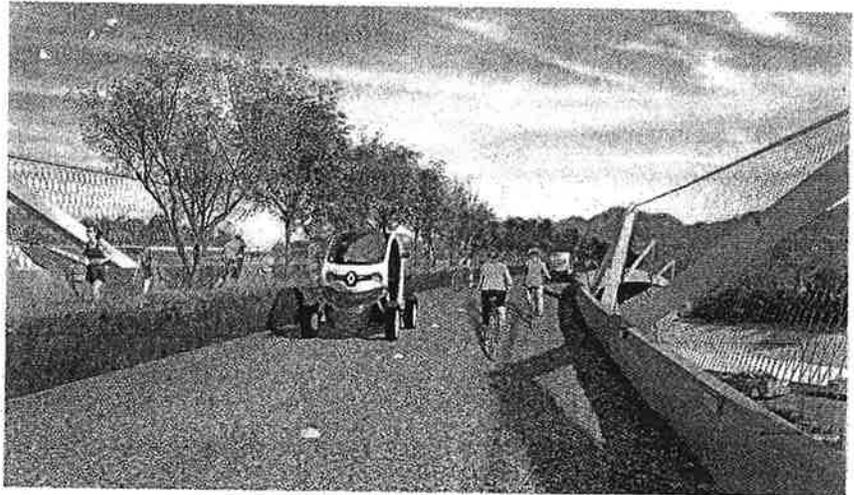
Much of the intended route for the 52-mile concrete path that would run from Palm Springs to the Salton Sea, runs along the Whitewater Wash. But that area is mostly built out in Rancho Mirage, City Manager Randall Bynder said.

"What we found in analyzing this project in-depth is that the route through Rancho Mirage, because of the issues with the Whitewater River channel, would be so circuitous and disruptive that it seems like every alternative location brings a whole new set of problems for the community," Bynder said.

Crossing Highway 111 in multiple crosswalks is not safe for the pedestrians, bikers, joggers and small electric vehicles intended to use the path, he said.

It would also impact traffic. "Good planning doesn't mix high speed, high volume of vehicular traffic with pedestrian traffic," said resident Mary Jane Filice, who said the city "can only be negatively impacted" by the link.

Please see CV LINK, 6A



COURTESY OF COACHELLA VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

A rendering shows part of the planned 52-mile trail called CV Link.

CV Link

Continued from 3A

Resident Ron Sharrow said he “vehemently” opposed the link in Rancho Mirage and suggested it run on the north side of Interstate 10.

No one in the audience or on the council spoke in favor of the proposed Highway 111 and Bob Hope Drive routes.

“I think it’s really important for Rancho Mirage to stand up and say we are different from other cities involved in the link project,” Councilman Richard Kite said.

Looking at an aerial view of the link from Coachella to Desert Hot Springs, Kite said it wouldn’t disrupt the business districts of other communities as it would in Rancho Mirage.

“We don’t have a whole lot of choices,” he said. “I look forward to working with CVAG in the future to find some alter-

nate route ... if we can, and can pay for it (the Link),” he said.

In April, the City Council pulled back on its support of the link when Hobart raised questions about CVAG’s proposal that the nine cities dedicate 8 percent of their increased TOT earnings every year, from 2016 on, to cover the annual \$1.6 million maintenance costs.

Hobart estimated that would cost Rancho Mirage nearly \$1.5 million over nine years. CVAG and the cities involved are continuing to discuss options for funding the maintenance.

“I didn’t say stop (the project) but slow it down,” Hobart said, to explore options.

Desert Sun reporter Sherry Barkas covers the cities of La Quinta, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert. She can be reached at sherry.barkas@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4694. Follow her on Twitter @TDSsherry

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Coachella Valley Link project faces funding questions

By **Jesse Marx** | The Desert Sun

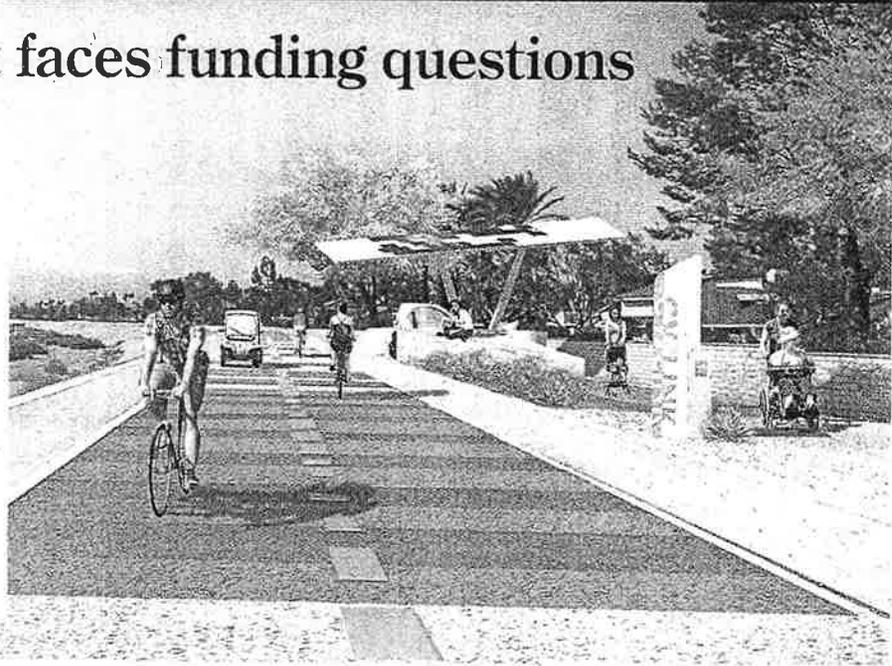
On April 2, Rancho Mirage City Council's five members met behind closed doors. By unanimous vote, they decided to slam the brakes on the CV Link, a proposed 48-mile bicycle, pedestrian and low-speed electric vehicle pathway that's beloved in some circles and despised in others.

Within minutes, the news spread: the city was calling into question the fairness and legality of current funding sources and demanding answers of the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, the lead agency.

In the meantime, the city would oppose the \$100 million trail — the largest infrastructure project in Southern California in terms of size. If built, the CV Link will run from Palm Springs to Coachella along the Whitewater River wash, with the possibility of extending someday to the Salton Sea.

Please see CV LINK, 10A

CV Link recreation path is shown in a rendering from CVAG.
COACHELLA VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS



today
for



JAY CALDERON/THE DESERT SUN

The CV Link, a proposed 48-mile bicycle, pedestrian and low-speed electric vehicle pathway, is expected to follow this path alongside the wash near Ave 50 in Coachella. The project has been sold to the public not just as a recreational marvel, but as a boost to the desert's impoverished neighborhoods.

CV Link

Continued from 1A

From the beginning, the project has been sold to the public not just as a tourist magnet and recreational marvel, but as a boost to the desert's impoverished neighborhoods. In January, Desert Hot Springs formally joined the project, becoming the ninth city to do so. Questions of fairness and funding had also caused elected leaders there to waver.

Elsewhere, the project has been hailed as the "spine of the valley," "something dramatic, something iconic," something that "takes down barriers." Even Rancho Mirage Councilman Ted Weill's website described the CV Link as "a revolutionary new concept in transportation."

It is ambitious. Yet most of the \$100 million construction cost — three-fourths — has already been set aside via state, federal and county grants, two years ahead of the slated groundbreaking. Expenditures since 2011 total \$1.7 million, mostly on consultants — about \$1.5 million of which went to Alta Planning and Design of Portland, Oregon.

But it's not so much the cost to build the project that rubs some folks the wrong way.

The Rancho Mirage City Council's decision on April 2 was directly tied to what follows construction — the upkeep of the trail. And since then, Mayor Dana Hobart has been on the war path, putting his training as an attorney to good use.

"If it can't stand on its own two feet, economically," he said of the trail, "it should be killed."

Who pays what

The source of contention are three very powerful words in the Coachella Valley: transient occupancy tax. Otherwise known as "TOT," or "the bed tax," these dollars come from hotel and resorts.

CVAG has suggested using the funds to pay for the trail's upkeep — the logic being that the project will boost tourism, so tourism dollars ought to pay for the future operations and maintenance, or O&M. The intention is to be a self-sustaining system that doesn't rely on cities to go rifling through couches for loose change.

In late March, CVAG Executive Director Tom Kirk approached some city staff with the idea of dedicating a percentage of one's TOT revenues rather than a concrete number based on, say, the mileage of trail in their jurisdiction. Kirk added this proposal to the association's April 6 transportation committee hearing, which is run mostly by local city council members, to establish a CV Link fund for O&M.

At that time, CVAG was suggesting that the annual O&M costs — things like repairs, graffiti removal and landscaping — would amount to \$1.6 million. And to pay for that, the association offered up a formula whereby eight percent of each city's annual growth in TOT revenue — using 2016 as the base year — would be set aside.

The proposal says "Draft 3/24/2015" across the top.

"It was the start of a conversation," Kirk told the Desert Sun. "There's a process here. It's not done in closed session; it's not done in darkness."

Rancho Mirage disagreed. Hobart accused CVAG's staff of trying to quickly push through the TOT formula, binding the cities to costs they didn't fully appreciate. Both in print and in person, Hobart has argued that elected officials in the desert had been caught completely un-

Bynder referred to the PR machine behind the project, including commercials, as "propaganda."

To back up his theory, Hobart points to CVAG's draft master plan, which was released in August 2014. Page 123 discusses O&M and states, in bold letters, "Construction and operations of the CV Link will not require local funding."

However, that same document goes on to list possible funding sources, including local ones.

Page 126 mentioned TOT specifically and suggests that the city of Palm Springs is considering using it. The document then reads, "Work is underway with the tourism industry to explore the possibility of growing TOT revenues and using some of the growth to fund O&M."

These are but a few sentences in a 158-page report and their meaning isn't entirely clear. In fact, different mayors see the TOT issue and Hobart's complaint in drastically different ways.

"These are ideas and options," said Stan Henry, mayor of Cathedral City. "We never even got to the point of discussion."

"There should have been more open dialogue on the issue rather than what was written in the document," said Adam Sanchez, mayor of Desert Hot Springs, referring to the 2014 draft master plan. As such, he sided with Rancho Mirage in arguing to slow down the project and perform an audit.

Of course, the O&M budget is in flux, so it's impossible to determine who will ultimately pay what. And to make matters more confusing, the two sides can't even agree on the best way to calculate each city's future financial obligations. Rancho Mirage says CVAG underestimated the city's annual revenue figures, while CVAG contends that Rancho Mirage is downplaying a funding cap that was built into the formula and allows them to take only so much.

These fundamental discrepancies are all the more reason to reevaluate the costs and assumptions of the project, Hobart said. "We're talking about a



Riverside County Supervisor John Benoit emailed 10 elected officials about their criticism of the CV Link.

RICHARD LUVTHE DESERT SUN

CV LINK FUNDING

The Coachella Valley Association of Governments, which is leading the project under the direction of local elected officials, says the following grants have been set aside for construction of the \$100 million CV Link:

- » CVAG Transportation Fund: \$20,000,000
- » Air Quality Mitigation District: \$17,400,000
- » Federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality: \$12,600,000
- » CA Active Transportation Program: \$10,900,000
- » Desert Healthcare District: \$10,000,000
- » State Transportation Improvement Program: \$2,000,000
- » California Strategic Growth Council: \$1,000,000
- » Riverside County Parks: \$750,000
- » Cathedral City Bicycle Transportation Account Grant: \$748,500
- » Caltrans Environmental Justice Grant: \$291,000*
- Total: \$75,689,500**

* The City of Palm Desert spearheaded the Caltrans Environmental Justice Grant because only a city can apply for those funds, according to Gary Leong, CVAG's director of administrative services. However, he added, the association provided another \$22,500 to match.

considerable amount of money and it makes no business sense to accept the project if we do not know that we can meet the responsibilities of O&M collectively as a group of cities for the decades to come."

Just last week, CVAG staff presented a new O&M budget, slashing an earlier idea to hire 10 full-time rangers and one manager, and calling instead for volunteer patrols to be the eyes and ears of the trail. Overnight, the annual O&M cost dropped from \$1.6 million to \$1 million, which equates to \$20,629 per mile.

"Under that scenario, Rancho Mirage would be paying just \$42,000 in year 9," Kirk wrote in an email. "By comparison, that's less than a quarter of what (the) Rancho Mirage council in March agreed to spend ... to market the 2015 ANA Inspiration golf tournament."

While admitting it isn't a perfect comparison, Hobart has asked his fellow elected officials to consider the American River Parkway trail with its estimated \$6 million a year O&M cost.

However, as CVAG staff have pointed out, "the Sacra-



DESERT SUN FILE PHOTO

Rancho Mirage Mayor Dana Hobart.

mento Jewel" is going to take up some 4,900 acres once built. It is literally a park system. By comparison, CV Link will touch 105 acres.

He also swung and missed at a May 4 transportation committee meeting, taking the podium to say he feared Rancho Mirage would be committing itself "over the course of decades" to O&M costs totaling "hundreds of millions of dollars."

Actually, that would take a thousand years, give or take.

Agreement

There is one thing that everyone agrees on: Measure A funds, a voter-approved half-cent sales tax that raises monies for public transportation projects.

But what everyone agrees on is that applying Measure A funds to the trail's O&M budget — as CVAG has suggested — is difficult, possibly illegal.

As Hobart has pointed out, the funds were intended for "streets, roads, highways," and not bicycle, pedestrian and low-speed electric vehicle paths. Even the Riverside County Transportation Commission, which oversees the collection and distribution of the tax, is unsure whether Measure A can be used on the CV Link.

"That's unclear," said John Standiford, the commission's deputy executive director.

Standiford added that it could be as simple as designating the CV Link as an "arterial roadway" or adding the project

Please see CV LINK, 11A

CV Link

Continued from 10A

to an RCTC expenditure plan for the desert. But that, too, could pose a problem.

Before CVAG does anything, Hobart wants to get the opinion of a law firm based outside the desert, preferably in the Los Angeles area, and intends to introduce this idea to the executive committee on June 1.

It should make for good theater. Hobart also intends to call at that meeting for an all-day forum where the desert's mayors, city managers and finance directors can debate each and every O&M financing option. Hobart believes the current TOT formula is fundamentally unfair because the majority of the tab will be covered by five cities — his included — that rely heavily on those tourism dollars to function.

What's more, Hobart emailed CVAG on May 3 to request that another item be put on the June 1 action agenda — one that would reopen a two-year-old vote and debate surrounding the financing of the construction side of the project.

At a Feb. 27, 2012, gathering of the mayors, Hobart voiced support for a proposal to match air quality mitigation fees from the CPV Sentinel Energy Project power plant with CVAG transportation funds. So long as no other "high-priority" projects were delayed, \$20 million could be set aside for the CV Link, then known as the "Parkway 1e11."

The Desert Sun obtained Hobart's email request through California's public records law. However, thinking that he might have accidentally given the document to a reporter, Hobart said, "Please destroy it."

He would go on to say that he no longer intended to reopen the matching air quality mitigation funds at the June 1 meeting. But he also deflected questions about why he had considered reopening that discussion at all.

"I prefer to discuss what is," Hobart said, ending his half of the conversation.

It should be noted that the only person to vote no at the Feb. 27, 2012, meeting was Coachella Councilman Steven Hernandez, who questioned whether the trail would consume funding for other improvement projects. The city was assured the money would still be there.

"And sure enough, the money has been there," said Hernandez, now mayor.

Of all the cities on the project, Coachella is on the hook for the least amount of TOT because it has the least to offer. In fact, the city says it currently brings in zero TOT dollars.

there's a route through Rancho Mirage that the residents and city council members can get behind.

The problem is that the Whitewater River wash runs through several golf courses, including Rancho Las Palmas and the Thunderbird Country Club, both of whom see the coming trail as disruptive to their way of life. As such, CVAG has held two public workshops in Rancho Mirage and met at least two times with a city subcommittee in the past year to talk alternatives.

On April 16, however, council members rejected a proposal to pave the path along the Butler-Abrams Trail or near the Rancho Mirage Public Library, where the city has plans to build an observatory. CVAG had proposed putting an electric vehicle station on undeveloped city land — which the city believes would burden their observatory with light and vibrations.

Three weeks later, the City Council rejected two other alternatives by forbidding the CV Link from crossing Highway 111 or Bob Hope Drive in their jurisdiction. Council members cited safety concerns and questioned what the increased traffic would mean for nearby business districts and homes.

Not every Rancho Mirage resident cheered at the news. Gary Lueders, who also happens to be vice president of the Friends of CV Link board, called the renewed discussion of the project's costs "refreshing" — he believes solar power panels could help pay for the project. But he was disappointed that the city's actions against the trail will prevent him and others from taking a safer ride to the library.

"The city is not planning for future residents," Lueders said, citing a growing national trend in bicycle commuters.

Rancho Mirage could simply drop out of the project altogether, creating a hole in the path. If that's the case, the desert's more adventurous bicyclists and pedestrians would be forced to navigate passages like Highway 111 and Bob Hope — the same streets that city council members wanted to keep bicyclists and golf carts away from.

Another option? Build the path around Rancho Mirage, which, of course, would make more than a few community members happy.

"Our council follows the desire of the residents as much as any other council," Hobart said, "and our residents clearly don't want it."

Rather, Hobart proposes that the path follow Da Vall Drive out of Cathedral City and cut easterly along the fringes of Rancho Mirage, toward the train tracks that run adjacent to the highway. From there, it would head back into Palm De-

But Coachella is also a working-class city, and many of those workers support the tourism industry, which in turn sustains the desert economy. This point must be considered, Hernandez said, if the question of fairness is going back on the table.

Nevertheless, Hernandez backs Hobart in calling for a review, so that, at the very least, the cost of the project — a valley-wide investment — can be justified.

"The public," he said, "that's what they expect from us."

A break in the chain

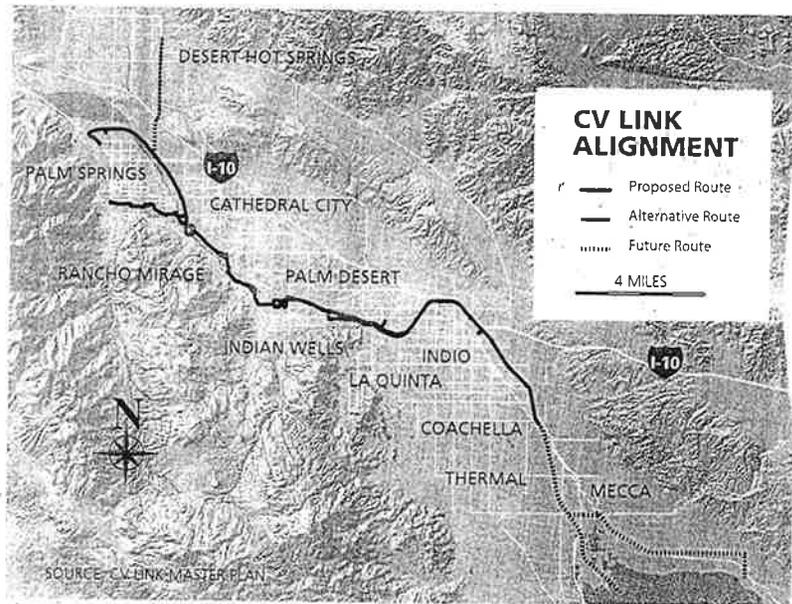
Much of this discussion assumes

ert.

This would make for a considerable detour, adding several miles to the journey — to say nothing of the long-term cost of the project. In an email, Hobart said the city would continue to work with CVAG to find other possible routes, but reiterated his central position: nothing should move forward until the cost concerns raised by Rancho Mirage are settled.

"No more pussyfooting around the subject," he wrote. "We require answers."

Reach Desert Sun reporter Jesse Marx at jesse.marx@desertsun.com; @marxjesse on Twitter.



IW leaders suggest CV Link slowdown

Echo Rancho Mirage's
concerns about project

By Jesse Marx

The Desert Sun

The Indian Wells City Council weighed in Thursday on the CV Link, echoing calls coming from Rancho Mirage to slow down the project and clear the air.

The cost of the project has been the subject of review for years, but took on new life in early April when Rancho Mirage Mayor Dana Hobart began questioning a proposal to pay for the future upkeep of the proposed \$100 million bicycle, pedestrian and low-speed electric vehicle trail using local tourism dollars.

Construction is slated to begin in two years, running from Palm Springs to Coachella. It

Please see CV LINK, 5A

MORE INSIDE



CVAG

A rendering of the proposed CV Link, provided by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments, shows the \$100 million project that is scheduled to be in two years.

CV Link

Continued from 1A

could later be extended to Desert Hot Springs on the north and the Salton Sea to the south.

"It's not about destroying the CV Link idea," said Ty Peabody, the mayor of Indian Wells. "It's just about getting answers that we don't have."

Peabody also sits on CVAG's executive committee and intends on June 1 to support Hobart when he puts forth proposals to slow down the project, convene an all-day study session, and review options for the project's future costs.

Hobart wants the Coachella Valley Association of Governments — the lead authority on the project — justify the assumptions and the data that are going into future cost predictions. In the process, he's warning that his and other cities in the desert might be signing up for something that will prove too onerous to their budgets down the road.

On June 1, Hobart will also propose that CVAG obtain an outside legal opinion on the use of Measure A funds — a half-cent tax that's supposed to be used on road repair — for the trail.

During Thursday's meeting, Peabody wondered aloud about the trail's security and insurance costs, casting a wide net. He even touched on the looming economic and environmental disaster only a few miles away.

"What happens if we don't solve the Salton Sea problem?" he asked. "Anyone gonna get on that?"

Indian Wells Councilman Dana Reed stressed that, though no action was taken Thursday, the city was not turning its

back on the project. That would not be reasonable, he said.

But he did point out that the city lacks a community swimming pool, baseball field, tennis or basketball court — and providing those types of recreational services "is a very legitimate role for government to play, especially local government." Assuming, of course, that the costs of maintenance are feasible.

Numbers provided by CVAG show that the trail, which is about 50 miles in length, will cost close to \$1 million per year to operate and maintain. To date, CVAG has spent a little more than \$1.7 million on the project, mostly on consultants.

At one point, Councilman Ted Mertens expressed concern with a CV Link television commercial.

"It's kind of misleading because it says 'coming soon,'" he said. "And the first spade of dirt isn't scheduled to be turned for two to three years."

The feedback from the public on Thursday was in much the same line. One person after another, some more sarcastic than others, called for slowing the project down. Two called for keeping any proposed route away from Highway 111, much as Rancho Mirage has already declared.

The conversation wavered, at times, but kept coming back to the question of whether the city could build this while maintaining its financial well-being.

"I'm counting on you, our elected officials, to do your due diligence and not sign up for any portion of this until you get correct answers," said Tom Conner, an Indian Wells resident.

Jesse Marx is the Desert Sun political reporter. Reach him at jesse.marx@desertsun.com or @marxjesse on Twitter.

YOUR VOICE

SEND YOUR LETTERS

» Letters must include a return address and telephone number. See a complete list of rules on page 10.

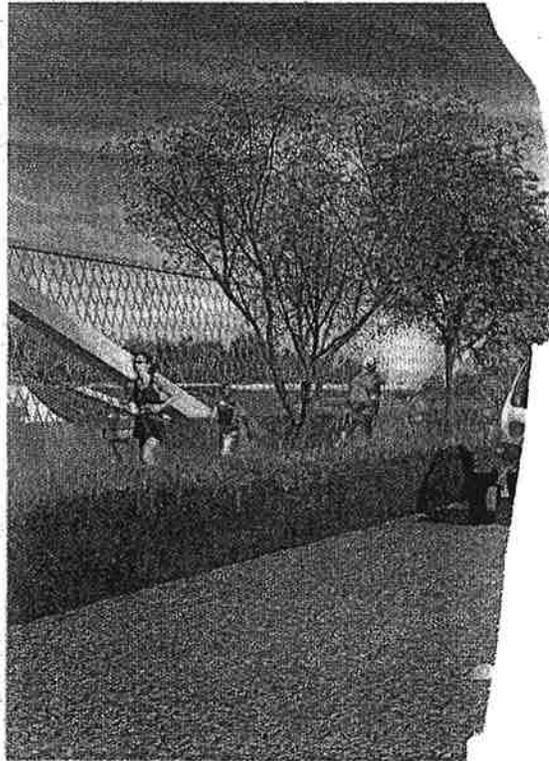
Pay closer attention

I have always thought and said that people don't read what really is being printed. Article in point: "Rancho Mirage acts to isolate self from valley peers," Valley Voice by Raphael Aguirre, May 27.

When Mr. Aguirre blatantly accused Mayor Dana Hobart of NOT wanting the CV Link he was wrong. He has never said those words, and if Mr. Aguirre would look more closely at what is printed, he might agree. Mr. Hobart is questioning the upkeep cost of the link. I think everyone has rushed into something without thoroughly investigating this situation.

I had to laugh when Mr. Aguirre said he had lived in Rancho Mirage since 1968 and remembered many restaurants on "Restaurant Row." I have been coming to the desert since the mid-1940s and remember nothing but sand and open spaces until around the 1970s when a few restaurants began opening. We now have closed restaurants and other stores because of the drop in the economy in 2008. You can't blame our mayor for that. I agree that Mr. Hobart does not speak for all residents, but at least he is concerned with where our money goes and how it will affect the future of Rancho Mirage.

Bettie Hedlund, Rancho Mirage



The CV Link, as envisioned in this rendering, would I

We should get a vote

Re: "Rancho Mirage acts to isolate self from valley peers," Valley Voice, May 27

I wonder if Mr. Aguirre ever bothered to attend a City Council meeting in Rancho Mirage and speak directly to the council on the matter instead of submitting a few paragraphs to the newspaper and hoping his elected officials will stumble across it.

I am thoroughly frustrated that we won't be given the opportunity to vote on this silly 50-mile sidewalk which will sit idle half of the year when it's over 100 degrees out.

Since I live in Palm Springs, run by a council which appears to have spent our money so irresponsibly that we're facing years of audits to find out just how much we've been fleeced, I hope and pray for the few remaining thoughtful stewards of our tax dollars in other jurisdictions to work to stop this project dead in its tracks. I am confident that if CV Link would be put to a vote in all affected jurisdictions with the true multi-year cost laid out for all to see, the answer would be a resounding "No."

Thank you, Mayor Hobart.

Robert Hansen, Palm Springs

CV Link? Count me in

It was with great pleasure that I read the recent Valley Voice written by Raphael Aguirre. I have been a long-time resident of Rancho Mirage and, even as a senior citizen, I am very excited about the CV Link and look forward to its completion. It will be a great opportunity not only to get some exercise but to meet the wonderful people of the desert communities.

To the stick-in-the-mud snobs who feel that it will cause more crime with a path through their neighborhood, please note that if someone wants to steal your old junk, they will do so with or without the CV Link.

Opponents of the CV Link should read about other cities, such as Washington D.C., that have similar paths that are enjoyed by their residents. I'm sure that users of the path will participate in keeping it clean. How about keeping in mind all the positive benefits of the CV Link instead of having a "sky is falling" attitude. I would like to see my city of Rancho Mirage survive as a vibrant, progressive, welcoming city and not end up a deserted, geriatric, has-been town.

Judy Gaudiano, Rancho Mirage

Most will benefit

I think the CV Link is a great idea for the future health and enjoyment of the entire valley, and I think it's a real shame that some choose to try to obstruct its creation at this late date.

I assume some of the opinions expressed in your paper in opposition to the CV Link are probably from well-off people who do not walk or bike or who do not have kids who will love riding their bikes on it. We all pay taxes for things that we don't benefit from directly, but that is part of being a member of a community. It seems really selfish to me that some people only look at their own interests and don't really care about what's best for the majority.

Why not get rid of the grass and lakes and some of the golf courses in the valley; they're all so retro and frankly, irresponsible, in this time of drought in our desert.

Let's work together to make decisions that are in the best interest of the majority.

John Roberts, Palm Springs

Airing it out important

Considering the CV Link is such a big project, there's surprisingly little in the way of a forum or venue where the

average resident's views can be heard. This is especially important given the fast-track, near steamrolling pace of the lobbying effort by the major proponents, who now appear to be on the attack against all those voicing objections or simply caution.

Thank you for providing the opportunity for those with comments, suggestions — either pro or con — to be heard.

David Grigg, La Quinta

Doubters deserve praise

The CV Link is an example of an elitist group imposing its wishes on the public.

They live in a dream world where the public is blissfully using the link. This will not happen. Coronado has a similar link and your life is at risk if you use it because of racing cyclists that dominate the link with no regard for others.

Our tourist numbers will not increase significantly because of this. The link will hardly be used in the summer because of sunstroke. The disadvantaged and the working poor will not use it. They have neither the time or the inclination. The percentage of the population to use it will be low: The well-to-do and only in the winter. However the whole population will pay for it. I wonder how many of the proponents will use it regularly.

The project is a boondoggle and should be canceled. I applaud the cities that are taking it slow. At the very least there should be a referendum.

Barry R. Welch, La Quinta

More CV Link questions

Re: Ongoing CV Link debate

The picture at the top of the front page of The Desert Sun on May 17 illustrates yet another example of the poor planning of this project. There is a wall separating the Link from someone's backyard. The wall looks to be about 4-5 feet tall. What's to prevent someone invading that yard or house during the day or night? Will there be security patrolling day and night? And who is going to pay for it? There are many homes bordering the Whitewater River wash and their security and peace of mind must be addressed.

Another point: A few years ago we experienced an unusual amount of rain, an amount that overwhelmed our flood control system and flooded the wash to about 10 feet from the top. It turned into a raging river. While we would all like to see more rain during this drought, this could spell disaster for the Link.

There also needs to be a detailed, published plan showing the exact route the Link will take, so everybody can see how it affects their city and neighborhood.

Don Underwood, Palm Desert

Bad spot for CV Link

In reference to CV Link there are already 36 trails and paths in the Coachella Valley. Palm Springs has eight or nine.

I live in North Palm Springs where part of the CV Link is proposed. This path will border on open desert. We have a major issue with windblown sand causing road closures. The most common ones are seen on Indian Canyon Drive, Vista Chino and Gene Autry Trail.

Ongoing maintenance for this section alone would be a money pit. This area is not a tourist attraction.

Would you recommend a tourist to take a walk, ride a bike or drive a golf cart around Windy Point?

We already have 36 inner city trails that have much more to offer.

Shirley Buch, Palm Springs

2nd CV Link path option

rejected

May 8, 2015
The Desert Sun

Rancho Mirage councilors worry about safety, impact on homes

By Sherry Barkas
The Desert Sun

There will be no CV Link on Highway 111 or Bob Hope Drive in the city of Rancho Mirage, council members said on Thursday — a decision applauded by the dozen or so residents in the audience.

The action, however, leaves the question of where should the link go in Rancho Mirage.

"We don't want to be naysayers," Mayor Dana Hobart said. "We're saying, keep looking. If we can find something acceptable to us, fine."

Thursday's decision follows the April 16 rejection of proposals by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments to build the \$100 million link near the Rancho Mirage Public Library, where the city has plans to build an observatory, or along the Butler-Abrams Trail — one of the few horse trails left in the city.

Highway 111 and Bob Hope Drive present traffic and safety issues along with concerns about the impact on area homes and businesses, council members and residents said.

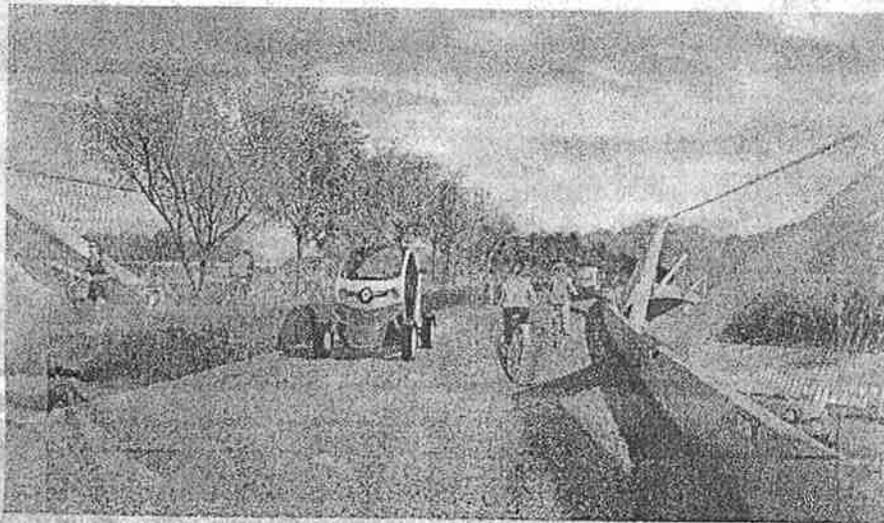
Much of the intended route for the 52-mile concrete path that would run from Palm Springs to the Salton Sea, runs along the Whitewater Wash. But that area is mostly built out in Rancho Mirage, City Manager Randall Byrnder said.

"What we found in analyzing this project in-depth is that the route through Rancho Mirage, because of the issues with the Whitewater River channel, would be so circuitous and disruptive that it seems like every alternative location brings a whole new set of problems for the community," Byrnder said.

Crossing Highway 111 in multiple crosswalks is not safe for the pedestrians, bikers, joggers and small electric vehicles intended to use the path, he said.

It would also impact traffic. "Good planning doesn't mix high speed, high volume of vehicular traffic with pedestrian traffic," said resident Mary Jane Pilce, who said the city "can only be negatively impacted" by the link.

Please see CV LINK, 6A



COURTESY OF COACHELLA VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS

A rendering shows part of the planned 52-mile trail called CV Link.

CV Link

Continued from 3A

Resident Ron Sharrow said he "vehemently" opposed the link in Rancho Mirage and suggested it run on the north side of Interstate 10.

No one in the audience or on the council spoke in favor of the proposed Highway 111 and Bob Hope Drive routes.

"I think it's really important for Rancho Mirage to stand up and say we are different from other cities involved in the link project," Councilman Richard Kite said.

Looking at an aerial view of the link from Coachella to Desert Hot Springs, Kite said it wouldn't disrupt the business districts of other communities as it would in Rancho Mirage.

"We don't have a whole lot of choices," he said. "I look forward to working with CVAG in the future to find some alter-

nate route ... if we can, and can pay for it (the Link)," he said.

In April, the City Council pulled back on its support of the link when Hobart raised questions about CVAG's proposal that the nine cities dedicate 8 percent of their increased TOT earnings every year, from 2016 on, to cover the annual \$1.6 million maintenance costs.

Hobart estimated that would cost Rancho Mirage nearly \$1.5 million over nine years. CVAG and the cities involved are continuing to discuss options for funding the maintenance.

"I didn't say stop (the project) but slow it down," Hobart said, to explore options.

Desert Sun reporter Sherry Barkas covers the cities of La Quinta, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage and Palm Desert. She can be reached at

sherry.barkas@thedesertsun.com or (760) 778-4694. Follow her on Twitter @TDSsherry

Rancho Mirage rejects CV Link over funding plan

By Barrett Newkirk
The Desert Sun

April 3, 15

The Rancho Mirage City Council has pulled its support of the CV Link path over a plan to fund ongoing maintenance they believe has the city paying more than its fair share.

The unanimous vote came during a closed-door meeting Thursday in ad-

vance of a meeting early next week where elected leaders from across the Coachella Valley are set to discuss the proposed funding formula.

The Coachella Valley Association of Governments estimates that annual operation and maintenance costs for the cross-valley recreation path will start around \$1.6 million, or \$33,600 per mile. The agency is suggesting that more

than half of that money come from a portion of the increasing hotel tax revenues cities expect to collect in coming years.

Rancho Mirage council members feel that approach leaves their city paying more than what's fair considering the city will contain just 10 percent of

Please see CV LINK, 13A

CV Link

Continued from 1A

the pathway.

They also don't support another piece of the funding plan they believe will take money away from local street projects. And they are against changing the city's hotel tax measure in a way they feel may legally require a city-wide vote, Mayor Pro Tem Dana Hobart said.

"We think it's a dubious concept at best to suggest that we could change the formula, and besides, it's unfair," Hobart said.

"Until everybody pays the proportional amount compared to the amount of linkway that they have in their cities, everything else is unfair."

Rancho Mirage City Attorney Steve Quintanilla said council members met in private because of the potential for filing a lawsuit, but instead of taking preemptive legal action, the council directed him and the city manager to notify CVAG Executive Director Tom Kirk in writing of their objections.

Hobart said that thanks to the reopening of the Ritz-Carlton hotel in Rancho Mirage last May, the city now collects the third-most hotel tax revenue of any city in the Coachella Valley, behind Palm Springs and Palm Desert.

However, a report from CVAG projecting cities' annual hotel tax contributions for CV Link into 2025 used tax estimates that placed Rancho Mirage fifth among eight cities. Local hotel taxes have the official name of transient occupancy taxes or TOT.

Reached late Thursday afternoon, Kirk wasn't aware of the stance Rancho Mirage officials were taking, and he questioned their belief that the formula was unfair.

"Part of the logic (of using TOT money) is that the project has an additional impact on the tourist economy," Kirk said.

He disputed Hobart's suggestion that the proposal calls for a public vote. The payment amount is based on higher hotel tax revenues, but cities would not be required to use TOT money to cover CV Link upkeep, he said.

Kirk has called the CV Link path the largest project of its kind in the nation. It's estimated cost is currently at least \$100 million, and so far CVAG has successfully raised about \$75 million without asking local cities for help.

The path is envisioned as an attraction for outdoor recreation enthusiasts and a way for people to more easily travel across the valley, possibly by foot, bike or low-speed electric vehicle.

The project has its supporters, namely outdoor recreation enthusiasts and the local tourism industry. Others have questioned whether the price is worth the final result and brought up concerns about the path not reaching into the valley's poorest communities.

The CVAG upkeep funding proposal says as much as 40 percent of CV Link's annual operations could be covered by money coming from cities for regional transportation needs.

It points out that other funding options exist, particularly grants and sponsorships, but that money is often temporary.

Using a portion of hotel taxes in a similar way to how property taxes have funded improvements through redevelopment agencies, has never been done before, the report says. And "there are few areas in the state of California where the tourist industry is such a dominant part of the economy and tax structure" as the Coachella Valley.

The report makes a case against setting funding based on the amount of pathway in each city. Such a plan would leave Palm Springs with a third of the annual costs since 33 percent of the path

"We think it's a dubious concept best to suggest that we could change the formula, and besides, it's unfair."

DANA HOBART

Rancho Mirage Mayor Pro Tem

goes through the city. Instead, Palm Springs, which collects by far the most from hotel taxes of any valley city, would pay

24 percent of the costs, according to CVAG.

The TOT plan leaves out the city of Coachella, since it does not collect a

hotel tax. Coachella will contain 11 percent of the roughly 48-mile path, according to CVAG.

And even though Desert Hot Springs is the only valley city not included in the initial phase of the pathway, the city is part of the calculations CVAG used to meet its annual operating expense number, starting with a contribution of almost \$6,000 in 2017.

That likely won't sit well for Desert Hot

Springs leaders, who are trying to figure out how to balance a city budget without closing city parks or making further cuts to an already drastically reduced staff.

An extension of CV Link running through Desert Hot Springs along Mission Creek has been proposed, but Mayor Adam Sanchez said this week his city should be the first to see any construction.

Elected officials from

all of the cities will discuss the funding plan Monday when the CVAG Transportation Committee meets at 9 a.m. at CVAG's offices in Palm Desert, 73-710 Fred Waring Drive, Suite 119.

"There's going to be an open conversation on Monday," Kirk said.

Reach Barrett Newkirk at (760)778-4767, barrett.newkirk@desertsun.com or on Twitter @barrettnewkirk.

OUR VOICE

April 9, 2015
The Desert Sun

Officials must resolve dispute to get CV Link back on track

The idea of a 50-mile-long "green" pathway connecting the valley's communities has been on a roll, garnering the support of city and regional officials as well as others in the community, including The Desert Sun.

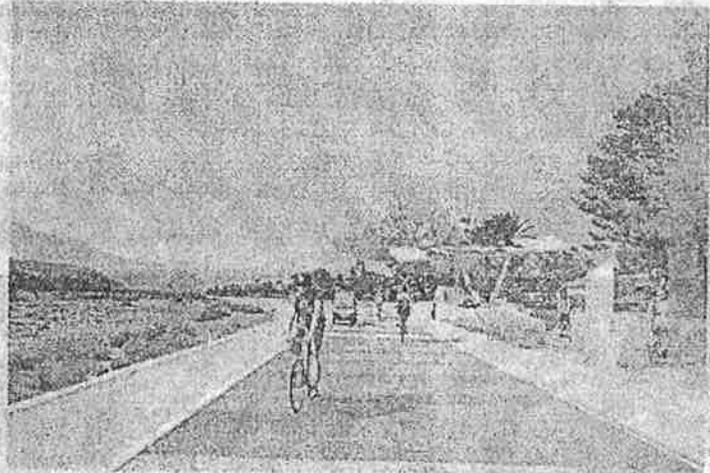
The massive recreational route, which the Coachella Valley Association of Governments — the lead authority in the project — says will cost upwards of \$100 million remains a fantastic idea.

While hopes of vibrant new revenue streams springing from tourists flocking to the new route seem a little pie in the sky, it's clear to anyone who sees the increasing packs of cyclists on major valley routes such as Highway 111 or Fred Waring Drive that CV Link likely would see use from Day 1.

This special venue certainly would be a nice complement to our current recreational offerings for visitors and locals alike.

CVAG, meanwhile, has put together about \$75 million of the current overall construction cost without asking Coachella Valley cities to pitch in.

But the first serious hint of dissent among this happy coalition erupted recently when the Rancho Mirage City Council voted unanimously to withdraw its sup-



DESERT SUN FILE

The CV Link recreation path is shown in a rendering provided by the Coachella Valley Association of Governments.

port of the plan over the proposed model for funding ongoing maintenance and operations.

In response, a CVAG committee on Monday postponed a decision on the financing plan, giving city officials across the valley more time to study the proposal.

CV Link remains a great idea, but the questions raised by Rancho Mirage deserve serious study and the dispute over how future upkeep will be financed must be resolved.

In a Valley Voice also on this page, Mayor Pro Tem G. Dana Hobart explains Rancho Mirage's concerns about how CVAG proposes to pay for ongoing maintenance of the route.

In particular, his city's concerns about the legality

of committing transient occupancy tax to such expenses must be addressed.

While Rancho Mirage and the other, more affluent Coachella Valley cities likely could find funds within their budgets to cover their CV Link upkeep obligations now and in the future, Hobart and his council peers are correct to demand more answers now on what could be an ever-increasing bill and how the costs might be most equitably shared.

Construction of the path isn't expected to begin for at least two years. Clearly these issues are best worked out now to avoid any chance the path could become a decaying white elephant along the spine of our desert community sometime in the future.

CVAG's proposed CV Link upkeep is not a fair deal

On March 30, Rancho Mirage first learned of the projected annual Operation and Maintenance costs for the proposed CV Link and who would pay them. We were shocked.

The lead agency, Coachella Valley of Associated Governments, projects that the "cost of operating and maintaining the CV Link is approximately \$1.6 million per year when the 50-mile facility is fully constructed" in about two years. This amounts to \$32,000 per mile per year, increasing by 2 percent annually thereafter.

Based on in-city Linkway mileage Cathedral City with 3.0 miles pays \$96,000; Coachella with 5.5 miles pays \$176,000; Indian Wells with 3.6 miles pays \$115,200; Indio with 5.7 miles pays \$182,400; La Quinta with 2.6 miles pays \$83,200; Palm Desert with 5.3 miles pays \$169,600; Palm Springs with 15.8 miles pays \$505,600; Rancho Mirage with 4.7 miles pays \$150,400; Unincorporated Riverside County with 2.0 miles pays \$64,000; Desert Hot Springs with an estimated 4.5 miles pays \$144,000.

CVAG apparently recognizes that few valley cities are capable of funding such enormous O&M costs. CVAG's plan to address this situation begins with CVAG proposing that about one-third of the \$1.6 million NOT be charged to the cities — at least not directly. CVAG proposes that about one-third of the O&M costs be paid by taking monies from Measure "A" funds and, to a lesser extent, from AB2766 "clean air" funds.

Measure A funds were created by a public vote in 2002 which authorized a 0.5% sales tax to be used exclusively for constructing and maintaining streets and arterials in the county. This is a vital valley resource. It seems imprudent to classify the Linkway as a "Regional Roadway" to justify this fund absorbing one-third of the cost of maintaining the 50-mile Linkway.

As for the remaining \$1 million in O&M costs, CVAG proposes that they not be based on "in-city Linkway mileage," but rather based on a formula involving Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) receipts: "Beginning in 2017, 8 percent of the increase (over



G. Dana Hobart

the prior year) in TOT would be directed to the CV Link O&M Fund." CVAG explains that the TOT receipts from the various cities will "be used to maintain the sections of CV Link within the jurisdictions that are parties to the MOU." This ambiguous language means if one city's TOT taxes are insufficient to pay for their in-city mileage of Linkway, the TOT receipts from other cities will cover that expense.

Furthermore, some cities are property tax based cities, unlike Rancho Mirage and other cities whose revenues are principally from TOT revenues.

Rancho Mirage voted to reject this formula because it requires some to pay far more than their respective percentages of Linkway mileage. Coachella, which has no TOT and other cities have insufficient TOT receipts to cover their Linkway mileage costs. The cities most negatively impacted would be Palm Springs, Palm Desert, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage and La Quinta.

This proposed TOT approach also raises serious legal issues. Proposition 218 defines a "special tax" as any tax imposed for specific purposes, including a tax imposed for specific purposes that is placed into a general fund. Once any portion of a city's TOT is obligated for the special purpose of operating and maintaining the CV Link, it arguably becomes a special tax which cannot be used unless approved by a two-thirds vote of the city's eligible voters.

Operating costs over the coming decades, and who will pay them, is the 800-pound gorilla in the room. This issue must be settled before — not after — the Linkway's final parameters and bells and whistles are determined. Now is that time.

Email G. Dana Hobart, mayor pro tem of Rancho Mirage, at danah@ranchomirageca.gov

CV Link check-in

Where is the voice of Palm Springs on the subject of the CV Link?

The city councils of both Rancho Mirage and Indian Wells have expressed concern about the future maintenance, operation and security costs of the valley-long pathway. Palm Springs is scheduled to have one-third of the CV Link miles and will be responsible for the largest portion of the ongoing costs. Yet, we haven't heard a word of official protest or concern from our City Council, even though the future expense of the CV Link could eventually reach into the pocket of every Palm Springs resident and business.

It's time for the Palm Springs City Council to actively protect its citizens by limiting the future burden of the

CV Link on our city.
Donald Richroath, Palm Springs

Paying their way

I pay a lot of taxes.

In addition:

I pay to use a golf course.

I pay to use work out facilities.

I pay to use a swimming pool.

I do not bike.

Shouldn't those who use the CV Link pay for it?

Ron Marinella, Rancho Mirage

Ne

Bridge collapse recalls desert flood disasters



Summer thunderstorms have been dangerous in the Coachella Valley

In the eons prior to the turn of the 20th century, the Whitewater and San Geronio rivers and their tributaries sent flood and storm waters rushing into the Coachella Valley, spreading tremendous volumes of water harmlessly across the desert floor.

These floodwaters flowed unimpeded as they made their way through washes and shallow depressions south toward the Salton Sink — a geographic trough roughly 234 feet below sea level.

Excessive rainfall wasn't a problem until people began settling in the desert and developing its arid, sandy lands. The new residents faced the Herculean task of taming these wild waters that threatened to wipe out their homes and farmlands.

The July 19 collapse of the Tex Wash bridge on Interstate 10 near Desert Center is among many disastrous reminders over the past century of how susceptible the desert and its residents are to the ravages of floodwaters.



Denise Goolsby

THE
STORYTELLER

The natural starting point to illustrate desert flooding in modern history is the Salton Sea, created more than 100 years ago. Heavy rainfall in the Colorado River basin in 1905 caused the river to swell and eventually breach a man-made dike in the Imperial Valley.

It took nearly two years to control the river's flow into the Salton Basin and stop the flooding. The result of the sudden influx of water and the lack of natural drainage from the basin resulted in the formation of California's largest lake.

Prior to 1915, the people of the valley — although few in number but with investments in ranches and new developments in the area of Indio, Coachella and Thermal — realized a regional effort was needed to divert floodwaters into controllable channels and away from their homes.

Please see DISASTER, 6A

Clockwise from top left: Sunrise Way is washed away by waters from Tahquitz Creek in January 1969. A fierce storm in 1938 washed out the Palm Springs bridge over Tahquitz wash on Palm Canyon Drive. The Southern Pacific Railroad had to move its lines several times when the Colorado River flooded the Salton Sink from 1905 to 1907.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF PALM SPRINGS HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND SALTON SEA HISTORY MUSEUM

Disaster

Continued from 1A

By this time, two small agencies — Indio Levee District and Coachella Stormwater District — existed, but were inadequate to protect the growing desert communities.

In 1915, the Coachella Valley Stormwater District was organized and an initial board of three men was elected. Meeting Aug. 7, 1915, at the Thermal Cantaloupe Growers Union packinghouse in Thermal were J.H. Northrup, a west Indio area rancher and developer; J.W. Newman, of Thermal, manager of the growers union; and Charles McDonald, a Coachella merchant.

The new district had just begun plotting its diversion strategy when Mother Nature unleashed a series of torrential downpours on the unprotected desert floor.

On Jan. 17, 1916, record rainfall inundated the area. More than nine inches fell in two storms — the greatest concentration of rainfall in any one month recorded at the time. The mountain slopes had been saturated by December storms. The snow pack was heavy in the Santa Rosa, San Jacinto and San Bernardino mountains. The storm dropped 4.28 inches at Beaumont and 4.40 inches at Cabazon.

The storm moved west to east and, by noon, floodwaters reached Palm Springs. As it bore down on the valley, it picked up water from tributary canyons, flooding desert towns, farms and roads.

Another severe storm devastated the valley on July 26, 1936, The Desert Sun reported then.

"Exceedingly heavy rains did much damage to the Indio-Palm Springs highway, now under construction. A subdivision near La Quinta Hotel was badly washed out. Near Indian Wells, a dozen families were driven from their homes when a cloudburst struck on the mountain slopes."

The raging Whitewater River in March 1938 flooded downtown Palm Springs, preventing visitors from leaving the city for almost a week. There were a number of fatalities throughout Riverside County and damages approached a staggering \$2 million. To put that cost in perspective, the average cost of a five-room house in 1938 was \$3,000.

Nearly all county bridges across the Santa Ana River were swept away, including the Pedley (Van Buren) Bridge, Riverside, and the Norco Bridge.

The bridge across Owl Wash, on U.S. Highways 60, 70 and 99 — between Banning and Cabazon — was washed out on March 3. This was a principal thoroughfare from Los Angeles to the desert at the time.

In September 1938, the Palm Springs

City Council requested that the state highway department quickly replace the bridge and eliminate the "hazardous (sharp and difficult) detour in the interest of protecting the lives of Palm Springs visitors and residents."

Six months after the flood, no work had been done to either repair or replace the bridge and city leaders were getting worried since tourist season would pick up soon.

A year later, "El Cordonazo," or "The Lash of St. Francis" struck Southern California and caused the greatest September rainfall ever. The tropical storm lost hurricane status shortly before moving onshore at San Pedro. Seven inches of rain drenched Indio in just three hours.

Another storm dropped 6.45 inches of rain on Indio in six hours on Sept. 24, 1939.

The devastating floods of 1938 and 1939 made it "painfully clear" the county did not have adequate flood protection. For some reason — most likely preoccupation with World War II — county supervisors didn't take action to create a flood control district until 1944.

Progress made

San Bernardino County, with the creation of its flood control district in 1939, provided a blueprint that served as a guide for its neighboring county.

On July 7, 1945, a bill approved by the California Legislature and signed into law by Gov. Earl Warren established the Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District.

In the ensuing years, numerous levees and other water diversions were designed and built, including the Tachevah Dam in 1964, to control floodwaters originating from the steep, mountainous watershed above Palm Springs.

Built by the Corps of Engineers for \$1.2 million, the dam was partially funded by the district and the state.

It was a challenge for the county to keep pace with unpredictable desert weather. A quick, unexpected downpour could cause flash flooding in a matter of minutes. All desert communities were at risk.

The floods of 1965 demonstrated the need for major flood control improvements throughout the district. Cottonwood Creek overflowed at I-10 east of the Highway 111 junction and all traffic was stopped for several hours. The lack of all-weather bridges and flooding of major roads resulted in the cities of Desert Hot Springs and Palm Springs being isolated for a period of time. Access to other communities in the Coachella Valley was severely impaired. Several lives were lost as a result of people trying to drive across streams. Cars were swept away, some with passengers trapped inside.

Highway 111 in Palm Springs was cut



The Desert Sun

\$4 Million Is Damage Estimate After Worst Storm In 40 Years

Saved By Stranger And Rope



Palm Desert Area Hit By Water Wall

THE DESERT SUN

The Sept. 11, 1976, edition of The Desert Sun.

in two places disrupting traffic for several days. Indian Avenue was destroyed by floodwaters from the Whitewater River. The closing of Indian Avenue for 30 days added to the isolation of Palm Springs.

The January and February 1969 floods in Riverside County caused extensive damage when the Whitewater flood control channel broke through and over control levees to "an untold number of residences," The Desert Sun reported on Jan. 27, 1969. "The Dream Homes area, along the eastern side of the Palm Springs Airport, was hardest hit when sections of the dike on the southern side gave way. The Crossley Tract, adjacent to the Municipal Golf Course (now Tahquitz Creek Golf Resort) also was hard hit."

Estimate of damage to the Whitewater River Flood Control Channel, extending through Palm Springs and nearly 50 miles to the Salton Sea, was \$2.5 million.

A bridge at Highway 111 south of Thermal was wrecked and it was estimated it would take about six months to construct a bypass roadway around the flood-damaged structure.

"In the meantime, traffic over the important approach road to the Salton Sea is being routed over a lower crossing of the storm channel," The Desert Sun reported on March 25, 1969. "The Highway 111 bridge was constructed in 1938 after the disastrous floods of that year. It withstood the onslaughts of the Jan. 24 and Feb. 5, (1969) floods but caved in during the Feb. 24-25 flooding. Southern Pacific bridge which adjoins the road span was downed in the January flood."

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THE DESERT SUN
Snow falls around the Plaza Theatre in Palm Springs in January 1979.

Another major tropical storm

On Sept. 9, 1976, Tropical Storm Kathleen swept into the desert, packing 75-mph winds and pouring nearly 18 hours of steady rain in and around the valley, dropping 14.76 inches of rain on the southern slopes of Mount San Geronio.

Deep Canyon above La Quinta recorded 2.96 inches in three hours on Sept. 10. Rainfall in the Santa Rosa Mountains above the Coachella Valley was called the "heaviest in recorded history."

Palm Desert and the Imperial Valley town of Ocotillo were hit the hardest. Damage to the business and residential district of Palm Desert was estimated at \$4 million — \$16.7 million in today's dollars.

A wall of water swept through the community when two earthen dikes gave way near Indian Head Canyon, The Desert Sun reported.

"The raging waters totally destroyed dozens of homes along Beverly Drive and Homestead before spreading over a broader field that eventually widened to nearly a mile when it hit the business district. Near its source, the boiling floodwater was estimated to be at least four and maybe five feet high. It knocked down walls, carried freezers and refrigerators several blocks. ... Scores of homes were filled by several feet of mud."

The bulk of the water and mud cut a swath through Palm Desert, ranging

from 100 yards to nearly a mile wide.

A portion of the floodwaters was diverted near Ironwood Country Club and flowed through Indian Wells, causing extensive damage to homes in the El Dorado and Indian Wells country club areas.

On the last day of January 1979, desert dwellers and visitors were treated to a rare sight. Snow. Palm Springs was blanketed in about two inches of the fluffy white stuff — the first substantial snowfall in the desert since 1949.

The Desert Sun produced a special snow edition to mark the rare occasion.

The Colgate-Dinah Shore Winner's Circle golf tournament at Mission Hills in Rancho Mirage was delayed due to the unexpected snowfall, which iced the course.

Two major weather events wreaked havoc on highways and homes during that stormy summer of 1979.

On July 20, a massive subtropical thunderstorm dropped more than 2.5 inches of rain across the desert — sending walls of water and mud through the Palm Springs area, knocking out a bridge across the Whitewater River Wash in Rancho Mirage, closing highways and wiping out virtually all telephone service from Whitewater to the Colorado River. A male driver was killed when the bridge collapsed. The bridge also carried the main telephone trunk line, which was washed out when the structure collapsed.

The worst damage occurred in a 10-square-mile area that includes Rancho Mirage, Palm Desert and Indian Wells. A section of Portola Road collapsed in Palm Desert. That storm caused an estimated \$40 million in damage to 200 homes.

On Aug. 16, 1979, another tropical storm pummeled the desert. The 3,100 residents of the mining community of Eagle Mountain, halfway between Blythe and Indio, were isolated for four hours after three inches of water fell in two hours.

The CHP closed I-10 from Eagle Mountain — where the Tex Wash bridge collapsed in the July 19 flood — all the way to Palm Desert.

"We don't get much rain out here, but when we do, it all comes down at once," California Department of Forestry spokesman Pat Stein said at the time.

Some things never change. Rain or shine, desert weather — especially in the summer — has a history of extreme behavior.

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I-10 bridge collapse a 'sign of what's to come'

By **Jesse Marx**
The Desert Sun

Heavy rains last month caused a remote bridge outside Desert Center to collapse. It disrupted travel on Interstate 10 between Arizona and Southern California, taking money out of the pockets of drivers, local business owners and regional commercial interests.

Engineers were puzzled. Why had the Tex Wash bridge — which received an A rating, just last year — been so susceptible to flash flooding? The incident highlighted a larger problem: the state's deteriorating infrastructure.

"This is a warning sign of what's to come, if we don't get a hold of this issue," said Jim Frazier, the chair of the California Assembly Transportation Committee, who recently toured the wreckage.

It's no secret that the state's 50,000 miles of highways and nearly 13,000 bridges, which consistently rank among the worst in the nation, are in need of widespread repair. One study, released in July by a Washington DC-based think tank known as TRIP, put the Los Angeles and San Francisco metropolitan areas atop the list of rough rides. The authors estimated that almost three-fourths of major thoroughfares in those areas are in poor condition.

The question is how to pay for these repairs, but there's fundamental disagreement between Democrats and Republicans about the source. Rather than debate it during the normal budget process this spring, Gov. Jerry Brown called two special sessions over the summer — one on health care and one on transportation.

He and fellow Democrats say the state's gas tax, which constitutes much of the funding, has only enough to cover \$2.3 billion worth of work — a sliver of the estimated \$59 billion backlog. An association of city officials, engineers and planning wonks known as Save California Streets estimated in

Collapse

Continued from 1A

2014 that Riverside County alone needed \$5.2 billion over the next decade for roads and bridges. Others have put that number closer to \$1 billion.

Sen. Jim Beall is leading the Democratic effort with a proposal to raise the gas tax by 10 cents per gallon, increase the vehicle registration fee by \$35, and require zero-emission cars to pay an annual \$100 fee. The rise in fuel-efficient and electric vehicles, combined with an unwillingness to let the price of fuel keep pace with inflation, has helped shrink revenues.

But any tax increase will need bipartisan support, and Republicans have been quick to point out an uncomfortable truth: the state has been robbing transportation funds for years to plug holes in the budget elsewhere.

Republican Sen. Jeff Stone, who represents the Coachella Valley, used the example of Proposition 42. The measure was approved by voters in 2002 as a means of raising money for local projects, then rerouted to the state's general fund by lawmakers.

"They circumvented the will of the citizens of California and diverted billions of dollars," Stone said.

Instead of creating new sources of revenue, Republicans would like to see those dollars returned to their original purpose. Different proposals have been offered in the Senate and Assembly, but legislators in both branches agree that at least \$2.9 billion could be recaptured every year.

How? By ending the diversion. repaying transportation

loans, and capturing a portion of cap-and-trade funds for roads. The Assembly plan is the bigger of the two. It would, for instance, eliminate 3,500 positions at the California Department of Transportation, or Caltrans, that the Legislative Analyst's Office has suggested are redundant.

Republican Assembly member Chad Mayes, who represents Palm Springs and parts of the high desert, is co-authoring a constitutional amendment that would ensure vehicle fees and taxes go only to transportation purposes. He pointed to charts released earlier this year by Caltrans analysts showing the various

routes these dollars end up taking.

"The way we receive revenue and spend money is all over the place," Mayes said. "It is incredibly complex and it's broken."

Assembly member Eduardo Garcia, a Democrat from Coachella, has said he's open to a more comprehensive approach that would raise taxes while sending some transportation funds back to their original intent. Assembly speaker Toni Atkins offered a similar framework in February, only to be replaced by Beall's.

Opposition to any new form of revenue, Garcia added, is "a very poor excuse for jeopardizing

the safety, not just of Californians, but those traveling through our state." He's been tapped to sit on the transportation special session committee.

This approach — combining new revenue with improved oversight and reform of the existing pot — has the support of various business, local government and labor coalitions. As Robert Lapsley, president of the California Business Roundtable, noted, the state is sitting on a surplus, so that money could be returned to transportation purposes without impacting current programs.

"You don't just grab that money and keep it permanent-

ly when we are out of funding for roads," he said.

Republicans are also looking into why the cost of building, maintaining and overseeing California's infrastructure is so much higher than other states. A study released last year by the Reason Foundation, a Libertarian think tank, estimated that in 2012 California spent \$501,136 per mile.

The national average that year was \$162,202 per mile — slightly more than what Texas spends.

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