



Northwest AZ – Town Hall Outreach targets transportation

By **Arizona Rural Headlines Examiner**, Trudy Schuett
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James Roberts speaks at the Mohave County Administration Building - Mohave County photo

KINGMAN – James Roberts, Mohave County’s Transportation Commission chairman since the commission was formed, shared his expertise during an Arizona Town Hall Community Outreach program Wednesday, Sept. 23, at the County Administration Building.

The Town Hall rolled out “Transportation” as the vehicle of discussion. Speakers Roberts and Western Arizona Council of Government (WACOG) Finance Director Dave Barber had attended the 94th Arizona Town Hall (From Here to There: Transportation Opportunities for Arizona) held in Tucson in April.

Arizona Town Hall President Tara Jackson led the discussion with the help of Mohave County Manager Ron Walker, who is also vice chair of administration on the Town Hall Board of Directors.

Barber spoke about the need for better transportation in the area as well as the importance of planning for future needs and suggested audience members help point out to state legislators that they should not continue raiding local Highway User Revenue Funds (HURF), money used for road improvement, to pay for the state Department of Public Safety.

Mohave Valley resident James Roberts believes knowledge is the best way to improve transportation in Mohave County.

“We need to educate the public,” he said, pointing out that many residents do not know that there is air, rail and bus transportation available locally. “We have rail between Kingman and Needles, Calif.; Greyhound serves Kingman and, starting just recently, Bullhead City; and we have two flights each day out of the Kingman Airport to Ontario, Calif.”

Roberts pointed out that increased public awareness of the transit options we have now will lead to more riders and that increases profit and expands services.

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“If we don’t tell people about these things, funding won’t come and services won’t expand,” he said.

Roberts found the 94th Arizona Town Hall process “well worth doing. Ron (Walker) invited me to be involved in the Town Hall. There were around 100 people there for three days of intense discussions.”

One of the recommendations from that Town Hall is to “establish a Citizen Transportation Review Commission.” Legislation would have to be passed to form the Commission, “coordinated by ADOT (Arizona Department of Transportation) and composed of representatives of the governor’s office, Legislature and stakeholders representing cities, towns, counties,” etc. If that recommendation comes to fruition, Roberts recommends interested residents to get involved.

Following the Community Outreach program, Roberts discussed the issues further as well as his own experience and expertise. Jackson introduced him as a “retired manager of the Technology Assurance Program for the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration).”

“Caltech (California Institute of Technology) is the parent holder of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory,” Roberts said. “They are funded by

NASA through grants. We were not civil servants. We were basically workers for a university. I retired from Caltech. As such, all of the experience I have in any form of transportation, mainly high-speed rockets, came as a result of working for JPL.

“I was actually in quality engineering,” he said. “For all of the flight projects, from the first soft landing on the Moon to the final soft landing and Rovers going on Mars, I was quality manager. We had roughly 100 people all over the world. I then took over as quality manager for the Deep Space Network, which is a network of antennas all around the world.”

Roberts said he had to travel a lot and was involved in dealing with governing agencies and private industry in building those antennas. His experience of getting infrastructure built in spite of a variety of bureaucratic hoops in several countries honed skills that help him in his quest to improve rural transportation.

“You get a feel for how to deal with people involved with (transportation) issues and their expertise,” he said. “You can very quickly recognize someone who can be dedicated to a proposition and wants to help. You can find commitment to make projects go.”

Roberts retired in 1995. In 1997, then-Supervisor Jim Zaborsky “knew that I had

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worked for Caltech and of my ability to handle meetings. He asked me to start the Mohave County Transportation Commission. I was the first chairman and I still am. As such, we used our collective expertise. In each of the three supervisorial districts, we look at all projects and advise” the Board.

Roberts said studies claim there will be some 73,000 new residents in the county over the next several years, which is why planning and public education is so important.

“We have a five-year plan,” he said. “As we get those 73,000 people and they start using all the facilities for transportation, it (transportation infrastructure) will build.”

Besides educating residents on available bus, rail and air transportation, Roberts wants the public to know about some of the new technology being used.

“Our Engineering Division at the county is perfecting soil stabilization,” he said. “We presently have 163 miles of roadway in service (using this technology). We are tracking (soil stabilization usage) very closely. Right now, Mohave County has 1,800 miles of roadway, 450 of which are paved. The soil stabilization process cuts 20 percent off the cost of paving. That means” the county’s remaining HURF dollars can go a longer way.

That’s where education comes in again, he said. People need to learn “where the dollars come from and how they are spent. And they need to educate the state representatives, who control the dollars. (HURF) dollars are controlled at the state house, not here. That’s a tough nut to crack.”

Roberts talked of the viability of toll roads.

“There is money to be raised by toll roads,” he said. “The truckers will use them. They would rather go around high traffic areas and get on with their trucking. They make their money by delivering goods, not by sitting in traffic jams. The current route through Bullhead City as a result of (the 9-11 terrorist attack and the Hoover Bypass Bridge construction)...is a pain in the neck to the truckers. It is also a pain in the neck to citizens because the trucks turn over on our bridges, and that really causes transportation problems.”

Any new road building is getting extremely expensive, he said. “Materials are skyrocketing. Getting rights of way and meeting federal standards are becoming very expensive. But people will keep trying to get (transportation) problems solved.

“Vanderslice is our current major activity,” Roberts said. “And I was a little surprised to read about the [proposed Interstate 11 project](#) . That will definitely impact this county. They

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will use US 93 rights of way to establish I-11. It will provide a lot of transportation funding but it will also take up a lot of dollars” that would have been designated “for smaller road improvements.”



Published materials that include recommendations from the 94th Arizona Town Hall on transportation are available on the Town Hall website: <http://www.aztownhall.org/>



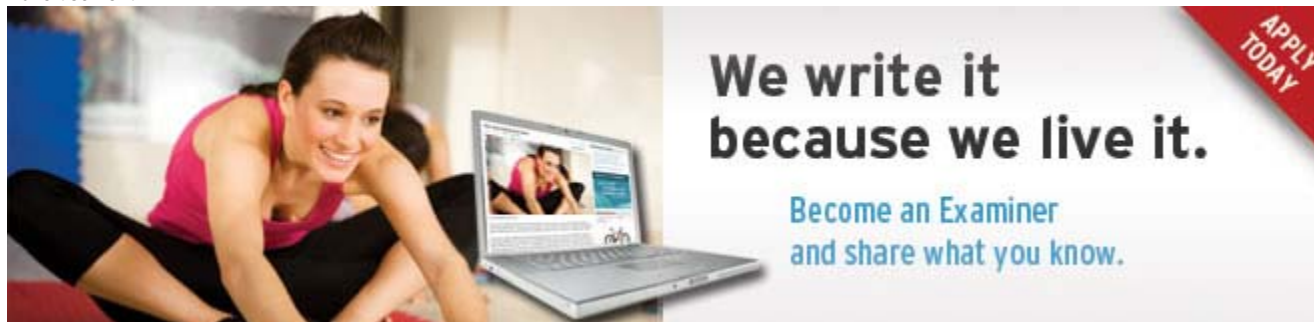
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“I really enjoyed my involvement in the Town Hall process,” Roberts said. “It’s a treat. You really do get involved in three days of labor. Fortunately, my wife, Loa, goes with me everywhere I go. So that makes it very pleasant.”

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