

Broadway Widening



On Monday I was pleased to host a large public gathering that was intended to simply say to the RTA and to TDOT that we want our money to be spent wisely, our roads to be designed wisely, businesses and residences to be preserved where possible, and generally, listen to the people paying the bills. By my estimate, there were about 200 people gathered out in 90 degree heat to show those who think that they're the powers-that-be that we're serious about wanting the citizen's who are paying for the RTA projects to have a legitimate voice in the design process.

For its part, the RTA believes scaling back on projects poses an existential threat. Even after the meeting, comments made by one RTA representative who was present were dismissive of the passionate voices he had just heard speak. By my head count, the collective voice was pretty impressive. I guess by his, the attitude was that of "Boss" Tweed when he said, *"As long as I count the votes, what are you going to do about it?"*

Here's what

The meeting was held at the First Assembly of God church, scheduled for demolition if we widen Broadway on the north side of the road. Speaker after speaker voiced opposition to the unnecessary destruction of multiple buildings, and spending millions of dollars that we don't have to waste. Thanks go out to the neighborhood representatives, business representatives, historic preservationists, alternate mode advocates and the other elected who came to speak out or sent their representative.

There is an RTA committee made up of citizen's whose job is to hold the RTA accountable to the taxpayers. In fact, the name of the committee is the Citizen's Accountability for Regional Transportation committee (CART). I had wanted to directly contact them in order to invite their participation. The RTA would not divulge to me contact information for the members in a manner timely enough for me to do personal invitations. In fact, initially they simply refused to be of any help in contacting them, until on advice of their counsel; they relented, so much for being willing to be held "accountable" by the citizen's. Several of the members found their way to the event anyway because the RTA sent them my Press Release through their own email system.

So, what was the specific message that was heard by the RTA and TDOT on Monday? Simple. Listen to the people. There will be a Citizen's Task Force formed to participate in the design of the Broadway widening. The members of that Task Force are each being required to sign a "Charter" before they may begin to serve as volunteers on that Task Force.

Here is language that appears in the Charter that each member of the Citizen's Task Force is being asked to sign:

“Approved Scope – widen Broadway Boulevard between Euclid Avenue and Country Club Road, with 6 travel lanes and 2 dedicated bus lanes; bike lanes in each direction; raised, landscaped median; ADA accessible sidewalks; and continuous street lighting.” On the final page of the Charter, at the top of the signature page, it states “By signing this Project Charter each individual indicates an understanding of and commitment to the Scope, Budget and Schedule described in this document...”

That boxes in the content of what can be considered by the Task Force members in the design process and it is the reason the people raised their collective voice on Monday evening. And yet, the design team is going to be asked to also consider these comments from the Charter:

“A value engineering analysis will be performed to determine if a northward widening is in fact the best choice. If a southward widening is found preferable, this scope will need to be revised.” Those of you who live along the southern alignment who thought you were out of the conversation, you're not.

But note; the RTA has allowed themselves the option of changing the project scope if it fits their own desires. More from the Charter:

“A number of structures are located along the project reach that are significant either historically or architecturally. While not all of these can be avoided, minimizing impacts to them will be important.” The task force needs to ask how one minimizes the impact of demolishing a building.

I've spoken with former City Council member Steve Leal about the early formation of the RTA. He has confirmed that during the first stages of putting this transportation plan into effect, it was made clear time and time again that when the design of the roadways began, the citizen's would be participants, and their voice would be heard.

This is a City issue. And yet, every week – nearly every day now I hear from somebody that the County is one animal and the City is another. But the fact is they're inter-mixed. Here is the data that demonstrates that fact:

BY PIMA COUNTY SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT

Numbers and Percentages of Active
Voters within the City Limits of Tucson

Supervisorial District Number	Total Number of Active Voters within District	Total Number of Active Tucson Voters within Each District	Total Percentage of Active Tucson Voters within Each District
1	116,555	0	0%
2	70,936	61,402	86.6%
3	85,248	33,071	38.8%
4	122,236	64,738	53%
5	70,257	48,559	69%

The only Supervisor who joined us at our meeting on Monday was District 5's Richard Elias. He gets it. Even the residents of District 1 travel across town on our roads. Every one of the Supervisors could have justified his/her participation in the rally. There is a Board of Supervisors election this fall. I'd suggest City residents listen very carefully to see whether or not your Supervisor agrees with the common euphemism that "the County" is the unincorporated area outside of the City limits. Clearly the District 5 representative understands who he represents.

So, what did the rally accomplish? The days ahead will answer that, but the message should have been easily understood:

- a. *Don't waste over \$25M on building capacity that is not needed on Broadway. That money can be better used elsewhere on the City streets.*
- b. *Don't tear down over 115 homes and businesses along the Broadway corridor*
- c. *Don't default to expanded capacity as the solution to our transit needs*
- d. *Don't assume the technocrats know, and are best suited to speak to the will of the people*
- e. *Do think outside of the box when designing the Broadway corridor – and listen to the citizen's.*

The success of this effort may become a template for similarly productive exchanges in which the best ideas will be heard and implemented. This can apply to the Grant Road Overlay, the Kolb Road Extension, the 22nd Street widening project, and others that either are in the RTA plan, or will come before us to design, develop and build in the years ahead.

If the RTA has any doubt that this is truly a city wide issue, they should consider that the following neighborhoods each expressed an interest in this event:

<i>Arroyo Chico</i>	<i>Broadmoor</i>
<i>Barrio San Antonio</i>	<i>Catalina Vista</i>
<i>Dunbar Springs</i>	<i>El Encanto</i>
<i>Elvira</i>	<i>Fairgrounds</i>
<i>Feldman's</i>	<i>Iron Horse</i>
<i>Jefferson Park</i>	<i>Udall Park</i>
<i>Menlo Park</i>	<i>Miles</i>
<i>Pie Allen</i>	<i>Poets Corner</i>
<i>Rincon Heights</i>	<i>Sam Hughes</i>
<i>Santa Rita Park – West Ochoa</i>	<i>West University</i>

Oh, and let's not forget the congregation that worships at the First Assembly of God church who were kind enough to allow us to stage the rally on their grounds, many of whom were also in attendance.

If the taxpayers see that the planners are not paying attention, every road or zoning project will be a fight and therefore unnecessarily excessively costly. Each of us who participated in the Monday rally did so with the hope that the template of listening, hearing and dialogue is now going to be put into practice. This does not mean that the impossible outcome of everybody getting everything they want will be the result. But it can mean that all relevant stakeholders in a given project will have an opportunity to share in a meaningful way during design.

“Ours is not an Orwellian Animal Farm city where we operate by his 7 Commandments, one of which is that “all animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

Road Repair

So, let's assume the net result of the rally is that we design to the RTA authorized \$42M. That leaves the \$25M that was authorized in 1997 for the bulk of the rest of that project. That's money we can, and should, continue to claim for fixing our roads within the City limits.

Last week I gave some information from the City Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. The County issues one, too. Here's how the County CAFR speaks about the County credit card.

GENERAL OBLIGATION BONDS OUTSTANDING

Governmental Activities (Payments made from property tax revenues of the Debt Service Fund) General obligation bonds payable at June 30, 2011, consisted of the outstanding general obligation bonds presented below. Of the total amounts originally authorized, \$9,530 from the May 20, 1997, \$121,276 from the May 18, 2004, and \$7,875 from the May 16, 2006 bond election **remain un-issued**.

Those are millions; i.e. there are about \$138M in unissued County GO bonds, some of which should be allocated to City projects, such as road reconstruction.

That comment might yield a reply from the County that they don't want to issue bonds until they've paid down their debt to the point at which new debt won't increase property taxes. That's a good idea. Also in their CAFR it states (P.65) that approx \$57 million of GO principal is scheduled to be paid down in FY '12 and \$39 million in FY '13. So, let's issue that amount and we don't have to touch property taxes. Working together, there is a solution.

The City has an obligation to tap City financial resources to fix the roads as well. I've suggested refinancing our own Highway User Revenue Fund debt to generate up to \$11M immediate dollars. We can dip into our reserve fund. And I will be asking about some figures that appear in the City CAFR when we meet again next week - all aimed at finding a way to financially put some skin on the bones of funding our roads.

I've mentioned County funds in the past and suspect this time will be no different. It will yield a reaction that pretty much suggests that there is City money and there is County money. Take another look at the table above though. Clearly, it's not "ours" and it's not "theirs." It's yours, and regionally we have an obligation to come together and invest in the infrastructure of this area in a way that reflects the greater good of the community - the wider community.

RTA - amending the plan

...and in yet another example of how they really don't want to hear what you have to say, the RTA attorney issued another opinion that affirms the publicly stated policy position of the RTA Board. That is, short of going through a State wide petition signing exercise, the voters of this region cannot change by either initiative or referendum the terms of the RTA transportation plan. In case you want to read the entire opinion, here's the link. (opinion link is on blog page)

So the RTA is saying that Pima County taxpayers need to get signatures from Maricopa, Pinal, Yuma and other counties if we want to revisit our RTA package in any manner. Like I said above, they consider taking a second look at any part of the package as a threat to their own existence. I believe they should seriously consider the ability of this region to get taxpayers to approve anything that looks like a bond if voices are shut out on this issue.

I've shared with you previously that the RTA Executive Director is open in saying that since it took four tries to get the RTA plan past the voters; he's going to resist any effort to give you another opportunity to express yourselves in respect to the Plan. This most recent legal opinion is their attempt at legal cover. But we know the statute gives the voters an opportunity to vote on changes in elements of the Plan. And we know the legislature could change the Plan by statute. And we know project funds are not fixed by what appeared on the 2006 ballot measure. If, as they state this is about maintaining their credibility with you, I'd suggest the result of the posturing is going to have the reverse effect. And that could have implications for Bond elections in the immediate future.

Those who will be promoting Bond projects should think that through.

Circle back to the Monday event. When a critical mass of people express a desire to be heard, it behooves those in elected positions, as well as in the bureaucracy to pay attention.

...next steps?

I had two gentlemen and one lady criticize the Monday event for my not having given people explicit instructions as to what they now need to do. Fair enough. Contact the RTA and tell them to change the Broadway Charter. Contact the RTA and tell them to address design concerns they heard during the first round of Grant Road Overlay hearings. Contract the RTA and tell them that \$22M is too much for a ¾ mile road extension out on the east side.

As I stated at the event on Monday – ours was simply the template for others to now follow.

Written by Steve Kozachik, Ward 6, City of Tucson