



**Manager Lorne Kramer**

**“Down and Dirty: Issues facing the City of Colorado Springs”**

**Date and Time:** Tuesday, June 29, 2004 at 11:30 a.m.

**Location:** Cheyenne Mountain Conference Resort

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**There are 3 major issues I’d like to discuss:**

- \_ A proposed ballot initiative that will dramatically improve our transportation infrastructure (That’s the dirt part)**
- \_ TABOR**
- \_ And, a vision for the future**

**As we look around us on a day-to-day basis, there is plenty to be cynical about-- if we allow ourselves to. But there are many good things going on in our City, that should increase our sense of optimism.**

- It has rained—several times;**
- the economy is rebounding;**
- economic development activity has increased;**
- we continue to have enviable crime rate and outstanding public safety;**

**· and Confluence Park—part of the S/W downtown redevelopment-- is becoming a reality.**

**You have all heard a lot lately about our roads and the decaying state of our transportation infrastructure. What am I talking about?**

**On each table you'll find an educational newsletter all about transportation. This issue is being driven by citizen action. The City's Transportation Advisory Board and the County's Highway Advisory Commission rolled up their sleeves and got their hands dirty working to prioritize projects, and negotiate City/County needs. This is actually the most comprehensive Regional planning effort we have ever had.**

**Then out of the Chamber's Transportation Committee grew the Transportation Coalition that is wrestling with funding and public education to move this agenda forward.**

**And to bring this problem face to face with you, we've brought out some visual aids today that I hope you'll take the time to look at. Curbs that are crumbling...Asphalt aging with increased wear and tear...see for yourself.**

**(Show Infrastructure Montage VIDEO) OR NEW URS "sneak peek" at RTA**

**Everyone has heard the song “London Bridges Falling Down”**

**Lets play our own version:**

**Please indulge me for a moment----Everyone please Stand:**

- **Now, all of you who were born after 1980 please sit down,**
  - **Ladies—you can sit down at any point you choose**
- **After 1970, sit down**
- **After 1960, sit down**
- **After 1950, sit down**
- **After 1944, sit down**

**Consider this: 60, is the average age of a bridge needing repair in Colorado Springs. I was two when many of these bridges were built and I know I’ve had to take care of myself—In fact I’ve even needed some maintenance over the years. Some people might even say a complete overhaul is in order!**

**Consider this: Colorado Springs ranks #1 among cities our size in annual hours of traffic delay. Furthermore, it is estimated that it costs the average commuter \$1.25 for every mile spent in traffic jams. Those are not Economic Development statistics we want to promote.**

**There is over \$825 Million in unfunded City transportation needs expected over the next 10 years.**

**Now We all know the difference between want and need. Our transportation problems have nothing to do with WANT.**

- **We NEED a new interchange at Austin Bluffs and Union;**
- **We NEED a better way to cross Woodmen at Academy;**
- **We NEED to fill the potholes on our neighborhood roads;**
- **We NEED better thoroughfares across town;**
- **We NEED better access to our airport.**

**That \$825 Million is not just a number—you as business people know that the number itself does not represent the full economic impact.**

- **It can be measured by how many times you wait to get through a light.**
- **It can be measured by how much money you spend on front-end alignments or new tires each year.**
- **It can be measured by how many times you were late due to traffic to your child's soccer match.**
- **It can be measured by how many accidents occur across the City and by how many police and fire vehicles were delayed in traffic getting to a scene.**

- **And as economically-minded individuals, you know there are a variety of other ways we can measure the impact.**
  - **Can customers get to your business?**
  - **Can your business get what it needs delivered when it needs it?**
  - **Are new companies interested in relocating to the nation's #1 midsize city for traffic congestion?**

**The City Council and the El Paso County Commissioners have been working together for over 6 months to bring forward a ballot initiative to deal with a prioritized list of key infrastructure problems for our community. This project has fostered unprecedented cooperation between our elected officials, and City and County staff and citizens. Everyone wants to see something done about our traffic problems—every community survey for the past 6 years has indicated this is a priority---how we accomplish that goal is what stirs dialog.**

**The current proposal would create a Rural Transportation Authority, or RTA, through the proposed collection of a 1-cent sales tax.**

**For the average household, this will cost just 42 cents per day...42 cents!!! So for the price of one White Chocolate Mocha a week, we**

**can generate \$60 million per year (\$600 million in 10 years) for badly-needed infrastructure improvements.**

**The RTA proposal calls for 55% of the funds to go to capital improvements. The City and County have worked hard to come up with a joint list of prioritized projects to be included in the ballot proposal. The top projects include an interchange at Austin Bluffs and Union, widening of Woodmen Road from I-25 to Powers Blvd., and replacing the decrepit Cimarron Street Bridge. And that's not all. (Explain rest of list).**

**It is proposed that this construction portion of the tax will sunset after 10 years—giving voters the option of renewing it to continue the investment.**

**The second part of the proposal will improve our maintenance. It makes no sense for us to build more roadways without being able to maintain them---so--35% of the funds generated by the RTA would be dedicated to ongoing roadway maintenance. As we saw from the video, this is perhaps our biggest need in the community now. Our current funding levels cannot keep up with the infrastructure maintenance needs of our growing community.**

**Colorado Springs has become a big city. If you take the number of road miles in the City and stretch them out, we have enough to**

**stretch from here to Boston. But, we're only able to maintain the equivalent from here to Limon every year. Now that's a problem.**

**As business people, I'm sure you're all aware of the downfalls associated with getting behind. You simply cannot afford it. The cost of 'catching up' puts you further behind, further at risk.**

**Planning is also critical to the future of our city. Especially when it comes to transportation issues. But that doesn't just mean planning for more roads, wider lanes, or improved intersections. It also means that we need to look at ALL forms of transportation. That's why the City's Transit Services Division is conducting a rapid transit feasibility study to look at the issues around building a rapid transit system for our community.**

**Rapid transit systems expand the capacity of existing transportation corridors. In other words, they reduce congestion by getting cars off the road. They create a more livable community, which in turn helps revitalize business districts and activity centers stimulating the economy.**

**Although the RTA money will not be used for this, we are developing a plan. The public is invited to be a part of this planning process right now. We just held a public meeting two weeks ago and there will be more in the coming weeks. It won't happen overnight, but the planning we do today will have an**

**impact for tomorrow. And I, for one, will take great joy, in catching a light rail near my house and riding all the way to downtown to attend Council meetings in 2020. Now THAT is a vision---or an hallucination--depending on your perspective.**

**So we've talked about 55% of the proposed revenues going to capital improvements, and 35% to maintenance. The remaining 10% of funds would be designated towards public transit improvements. Our current bus system is antiquated, and does not provide adequate service to our growing community. This dedicated 10<sup>th</sup> of a cent funding would enable us to serve the community with a modified grid system, rather than a hub system. The modified grid system would not require riders to come through downtown to transfer buses. Instead, there would be a series of direct routes, providing people more efficient access to the entire City and eliminate some of the congestion near our main terminal.**

**Consider what you would do with an extra 30 minutes a day that you were not stuck in traffic? Would you spend it with your children and family? Make one more client call? I'm willing to bet that we all have things we would rather be doing than sitting in traffic. Moving around town also means movement for our economy—they are linked—and that's down our alley—so to speak.**

### **Budget/Economy**

**Our local and state economies are improving daily, as you well know, but it is unlikely that the City will feel the full benefits of these improvements, due to the fact that the City's TABOR restrictions will prevent us from keeping needed revenue.**

**Almost all of the public attention over the past two years has been centered on the state's fiscal woes, and most of the discussion of TABOR reform has centered on TABOR in the state's fiscal and budget situation. The daily struggles of the 2,000 local government units---municipalities, counties, school districts, and special districts, to manage their budgets and deliver vital governmental services at the local level, have been downplayed and largely overlooked.**

**How many of you present here today have lived here over 10 years?**

**Now I want to ask you a follow up question: Who in this room (except Rocky and our elected officials) feels they could stand up and explain TABOR to the rest of the group? Exactly! I'm not being critical—it's part of the problem. TABOR is extremely complicated. But even for those of you who may know the intricacies of TABOR, you may not know (or have forgotten) that the City of Colorado Springs is actually bound by two TABOR'S-- LOCAL and STATE. If we only had to comply with the state**

**TABOR, we would have more flexibility. Instead, Colorado Springs is the only city in the state with its own additional localized TABOR requirements.**

**Now I am not saying TABOR is a bad thing...on the contrary the concept is one with merit and meaning. But let me give you an example. You're all business people. What if your business came through some tough times and finally began to show signs of improvement. Take it a step further. What if your business was on the rebound and could address significant needs from the leaner years? Would you take your profits and reinvest them in your business equipment and computers, your employees, and your tools and software? Or would you get out your customer database and send a small refund to every customer you had done business with in the past year? If your business were bound by TABOR, you'd have to set the money aside and ask every customer if they wanted a refund, leaving you with a zero reinvestment balance. That just doesn't make sense? Particularly when your business has other critical needs.**

**Our revenue limits for any year are based upon one of two figures: either a computation based upon inflation and local growth, (or) our actual revenues from the previous year – whichever is lower. And our revenue for last year – which is based largely upon your**

revenue for last year – was down. Down enough for us to cut back several services and eliminate 70 jobs.

As we meet today, our local economy is rebounding. I hope your companies and organizations are seeing the effects. We are: sales tax revenues are up. However, our ability to “feel” the effects will be limited because the City can’t use improved revenue to catch up... We won’t make a dent in our backlog of traffic and roadway needs, or drainage needs. We won’t even be able to maintain the flowerbeds that community volunteers are planting. Why?

Because we can’t spend the money... Our 2004 spending limits are based upon our weak 2003 revenue. (In fact our 2004 revenue limit is lower than it was in 1999!) At the rate we are going, we’ll have \$3 million in revenue this year that we’ll be obliged to return to voters unless Council is given voter permission to reinvest it.

And here is one more twist in the law. TABOR applies to grants. In 1995 we got a \$12 million state grant to rebuild the Colorado Avenue Bridge. That grant helped push our revenue that year above our local TABOR cap by \$16 million. Now that is a dirty joke—we qualify many types of grants but it counts against the overall revenue limit or cap. My point--we apply the grant money to the bridge, and then all the other operations of City government must cut their operation by that dollar amount.

**So today, when we consider applying for a state historic preservation grant, or a federal grant that could rebuild an airport runway, or any other grant or gift, we have to consider the TABOR implications. Sometimes we decide not to even pursue the available money, or we ask that the money only be granted in increments. We even have to be careful that the share of the gasoline tax that the state sends to us does not push us over our limits.**

**You may all know that the City Council has appointed a Charter Review Committee of citizens to examine issues such as these. We have charged 26 community members with looking over the City's Charter and making recommendations on several Charter issues: I don't think any of them are more important than our City Charter TABOR provisions.**

### **Vision**

**My last point has to do with the future.**

**For the past few weeks, we've seen a lot of documentaries and read articles about President Ronald Reagan. I found myself thinking of his vision. Political philosophy aside, none of us can deny that this man came to office with a vision of an economically sound country at peace with the rest of the world. He inspired a depressed nation**

**and its economy, and that inspiration was passed around the world, as the Cold War ended.**

**All of us, as leaders have a responsibility to make our community inheritable. We have to inspire our citizens to look over the horizon at the future we can visualize. We must have a shared vision.**

**President Reagan also once said, “It is time for us to realize that we are too great a nation to limit ourselves to small dreams. I do not believe in a fate that will fall on us no matter what we do. I do believe in a fate that will fall on us if we do nothing.” I believe it is time for us to make our visions realities here in Colorado Springs.**

**You’ve heard talk of a downtown convention center and possible Olympic park, and I’ve already shared with you today ideas about a Rural Transportation Authority that would alleviate traffic problems and a public transit system that would efficiently serve all areas of the City. All of these are what are becoming known as legacy projects. They are part of our vision for the future of Colorado Springs.**

**I hope by now you’ve all seen Confluence Park... construction is coming along beautifully and we will be dedicating it on October 1. However, this project is more than a park—it is a vision under construction. A fulfilled vision of major urban redevelopment. A**

**vision of converting a neighborhood that had been in decline for decades, with substandard housing and decrepit roads and utilities, into a downtown jewel, thriving economically and contributing to the heart of our city. The heart of any great community is its downtown. That's a fact proven out in studies nationwide.**

**Each of the projects I've discussed today is a legacy that will ensure a high quality of life and economic vitality in years to come. But, once more, I will call upon the words of President Reagan, as he said it best: "I believe we, the Americans of today, are ready to act worthy of ourselves, ready to do what must be done to insure happiness and liberty for ourselves, our children, and our children's children."**

**Is Colorado Springs is ready? I believe the opportunity is before us and we are ready.**

### **Conclusion**

**Now take a look at the pieces of dirty, crumbling asphalt on your table. They are not attractive and they are hardly functional.**

**Disrepair is not my vision for the future, I hope it's not yours.**

- **My vision for Colorado Springs is that we will have an effective transportation infrastructure that allows you to get to business appointments on time.**

- **My vision is that well-maintained roads and bridges will allow customer access to your places of business.**
- **My vision is that a thriving downtown, complete with parks and lodging, will become a center of economic vitality.**
- **My vision is that people come to Colorado Springs not only for its sheer natural beauty, but to become a part of our thriving community.**
- **My vision is that you share with me these possibilities and paths to building a future.**

**Colorado Springs needs your leadership, your opinions, your voice, your seat at the table. I challenge you to get your hands dirty and get involved. What is your vision for this community? We rely on your leadership to help us create the vision for Colorado Springs and make it a reality.**

**With that, I'd like to thank you for inviting me today.**

**Open the floor for Q/A until 1:25.**