

Contractors blast Nevada officials for not funding roads

By Sean Whaley, Nevada News Bureau

CARSON CITY – A contractors representative told the state Transportation Board today that officials missed out on opportunities to increase road funding in the 2011 legislative session, and that failing to act promptly on the issue could cost Northern Nevada a competitive bid for the 2022 Winter Olympics.

John Madole, executive director of the Nevada Chapter of the Associated General Contractors, said that while a number of bills introduced last session, “would have addressed highway funding and other infrastructure investment that would have begun restoring our state’s economic health, none were processed out of an apparent fear of ‘political incorrectness’ and concern of endangering the political careers of elected officials that must stand for re-election.”

Madole, who noted Nevada’s gas tax has not been increased since the early 1990s, asked the board to “take the lead in immediately planning for the future needs of our state, helping restore the economic growth that will return Nevadans to work.”

The Nevada Legislature would have to act to increase the state gas tax rate.

Rather than find a way to increase investment in transportation, the 2011 session took a step backward, diverting \$52 million in highway funds over the coming two years to the operation of the Department of Motor Vehicles and “putting another 1,500 Nevadans, who would have been employed

on highway projects out of work," he said.

Nevada has the highest unemployment in the construction industry among the 50 states, with more than 90,000 construction workers losing their jobs since 2006, he said. The seven-member Transportation Board includes Gov. Brian Sandoval, Lt. Gov. Brian Krolicki, Attorney General Catherine Cortez Masto and state Controller Kim Wallin. There are three public members as well.

Madole said Assembly Bill 152 from the 2011 session proposed to establish a group of citizens to address the state's long term transportation needs in Nevada and place an advisory issue before the voters in November 2012.

Sandoval vetoed the bill.

In an interview after delivering his statement, Madole said time is of the essence if the state is going to bid on the Winter Olympics.

"If we're going to do something about these Olympics, or anything else, we need to get moving," Madole said. "The presentation I heard said they might quadruple the air traffic out of Vegas where people are staying in Vegas, flying up here for the Olympics. They are going to get on Interstate 580 and head straight to the Spaghetti Bowl and probably wait 30 minutes to get through it."

Sandoval, who has directed the state Department of Transportation to look at the infrastructure implications of an Olympic bid, said Nevada is doing all it can to ensure it gets every road dollar available.

Krolick is chair of the committee to bring the Games to Tahoe-Reno.