

Carlsbad leaders take road issues to NM legislature

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JESSICA ONSUREZ
CURRENT-ARGUS From left to right,
Councilor Wesley Carter,
Representative Cathrynn Brown,
Senator Ron Griggs, and Ernie
Carlson.

CARLSBAD >> The power of photography is exceeded only by the power of numbers.

At least that is what representatives of Carlsbad who traveled Wednesday to Santa Fe armed with statistics and pictures of roads in Southeastern New Mexico hope.

The House Transportation Interim Committee was presented with photos of roads taken by residents of Eddy County as part of the "This is my NM Road" social media campaign that show just how destructive the increased amount of traffic has become to city and county roads.

The chairman of the Mayor's Energy Summit's Highway and Transportation Committee, Ernie Carlson, told the committee that based on his estimates of the oil and gas industry in the area, trucks hauling crude oil and condensate can accumulate at least 18 million miles a year. That estimate does not include the mileage racked up by companies and other industries servicing the oil and gas industry.

All that traffic translates into problems for an infrastructure that is not only aging but also isn't designed for those numbers.

But fixing the roads and undertaking new roadway construction means investing money that Carlson said is also not being fairly distributed, although Eddy County's oil and gas industry produces huge revenue for the state.

"The way that money is allocated is based on lane miles. The lane miles are not based on the activity that is crossing the roads," said Carlson, meaning that two districts with the same amount of lane miles get the same amount of money without taking into account the amount of traffic on the roadways.

"A lot of cities and counties in New Mexico need funding for roads, and we all know that, but I think our point is that oil and gas creates a lot of money for our state and contributes heavily to our economy," said Shannon Summers of the Carlsbad Department of Development.

Summers and city Councilor Wes Carter joined Carlson in Santa Fe.

Their message to the Legislature was that an investment in Southeastern New Mexico roads is an investment in the future economy of the state, Carlson said.

"We didn't just go there for Carlsbad, for Eddy County, we went there for Southeastern New Mexico and pretty much anybody whose dealing with this because of the Permian Basin," Summers said.

While the presentation fell on receptive ears, Summers knows that any change will still take time.

"I appreciate Wes and Ernie and Shannon making the trip to Santa Fe to testify about current road conditions in Eddy County and the economic impact of deteriorating roads," said state Rep. Cathrynn Brown in an emailed statement. "They did an excellent job before the committee. Their comments bolstered the message that we local legislators have been consistently bringing to our colleagues in the

House and Senate: Southeastern New Mexico has a need for road maintenance that is beyond the norm and absolutely historic.

"If roads in mining and energy-producing areas are not kept in acceptable condition, the economic welfare of the entire state will suffer," Brown added.

Carlson wrapped up his testimony before the committee stating: "I would like to see the Legislature revisit the allocation formula and process to take into account the activity that our area of the state has been and continues to experience. Additionally, I would like to see more of the revenues that we are sending to Santa Fe returned to our part of the State as a reinvestment in our business unit."

Residents can continue to submit photos of their damaged roads to the "My NM Road" Facebook page at www.facebook.com/thisismymroad.

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