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By ROBERT PIERCE • Daily Leader

The current Comprehensive Transportation Plan is set to expire in 2009, and some local and area community leaders are trying to work together to get state leaders to form a new plan starting next year.

Jack Taylor, executive director of the Southwest Passage Initiative for Regional and Interstate Transportation, said at a tri-city meeting Wednesday in Liberal, leaders in Southwest Kansas' three largest communities have been talking about projects they would like the legislature to look at in the next CTP for more than a year.

Taylor said in order for a plan of any kind to be passed, leaders in Garden City, Liberal and Dodge City, as well as other communities in the region, will need to pull together and talk about projects which will benefit the entire region for economic development purposes.

Taylor said a new plan will cover the entire state.

"We don't have individually a real loud voice if we go in there and talk about just individual projects for ourselves," he said referring to each community acting on its own. "If we can go in as a region, we've got a lot of population out here, and we can make a loud noise and be heard. We have been asking for resolutions from each city and each county."

Taylor said the Kansas League of Municipalities and Kansas Association of Counties have sent out requests in favor of a new transportation plan.

“We need to think about projects that will benefit all of Southwest Kansas,” he said. “We’ve had two meetings in Garden City last year where we started talking about the SPIRIT project. Soon after that, KDOT started meeting the same way, talking about projects and regionalization and getting priorities in order.”

Taylor said Governor Kathleen Sebelius recently formed a transportation task force.

“I don’t know if the results of those meetings by themselves will be enough to convince the legislature of the need for transportation infrastructure to help us with our economic growth and with our economic development efforts,” he said.

Taylor said information also needs to be included on the effects of not having a new transportation plan.

“What’s the downside?” he said. “It doesn’t take a lot to talk about all the good it’s going to do, but what’s the bad it’s going to do if we don’t get a Comprehensive Transportation Plan?”

Taylor said there will be two interim legislative transportation committee meetings – one on Nov. 24 in Wichita and the other on Dec.

5 in Garden City. It is not known for sure where the meeting will be in Garden City or what time, he noted.

On Oct. 8, the mayors and chief administrative officers of Dodge City, Garden City and Liberal met at the City Administrative Center in Garden City to discuss the possibility of getting the Tri-City Coalition meetings, which have been stalled since mid-year.

Attendees agreed that this initiative is critical to advancing some of the major issues that have the greatest impact on the residents of the region.

After a series of discussions, it was agreed that the meetings would continue Wednesday evening in Liberal, at which time, the members of the coalition were presented with a document articulating a set of issues and positions that will be supported during the upcoming Kansas Legislative Session.

At the October meeting, staff was directed to solicit proposals for an on site advocate in Topeka for specific issues.

However, one will only be retained at such point in time the cities enter into an interlocal agreement that would be considered by each governing body at their respective regular meetings following Wednesday's meeting.

Moreover, the executive committee indicated the need to invite other interested communities in the region to Wednesday's meeting for the purposes of gauging their interest in further participating in the initiative.

Liberal Mayor Joe Denoyer received an e-mail from Wichita Mayor Carl Brewer offering his support and encouragement of efforts in forming a regional coalition among cooperating cities of Southwest Kansas.

"As partners with the common goal of creating the best economic climate for the state of Kansas, our geographic areas are best served by working together at every opportunity," Brewer said. "I look forward to working with you, and I would be happy to introduce your new organization to our own Regional Economic Area Partnership.

Together, we can explore more opportunities for progress for our great state."

Following Wednesday's discussion of proposed coalition policies as presented by the executive committees, each individual governing body will present the proposed policy for official action at a regular or special meeting of its governing body. No coalition policy shall be enacted except

by formal approval from the three governing bodies.

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