

STATE FUNDING PRIORITIES

ROAD RAGE!

Predictions of highway gridlock are biased and wildly speculative.

BY GLENN CAMPBELL

As if our state didn't have enough to worry about, we learned last week that Las Vegas will soon face highway gridlock if our governor and legislators don't pony up \$450 million for new road construction.

"If we don't get the money, we will have to postpone projects," said state Transportation Director Susan Martinovich, quoted in the *Review-Journal*. "Congestion will increase, and congestion will cost you time and money."

Not that things are terribly bad right now. In our own voyages around the valley, we have encountered predictable rush-hour traffic, but nothing like what we have seen in other cities.

No, it's future congestion we need to worry about. We know we're heading for gridlock because the *Review-Journal* told us so.

"WORSE CONGESTION PREDICTED" said the R-J in its Feb. 23 headline.

After quoting Martinovich, the article said: "A Reason Foundation study predicted Las Vegas will become the ninth most congested city in the nation by 2030 unless a substantial investment is made in new road construction. Trips that should take 30 minutes will take 52 minutes that year, according to the study, released in 2006."

But what is the Reason Foundation?

Something about that name sounds just a little... unreasonable.

We looked it up. The Reason Foundation is a libertarian think tank funded by—guess who?—auto makers, oil companies and other big corporate sponsors. Most of the companies on the foundation's donor list have a vested interest in seeing more highways built and therefore in predicting the imminent collapse of the current road system.

We located the 2006 study. Turns out, it isn't just Las Vegas that's facing dire straits, but the entire country. Traffic delays in urban areas are projected to increase by 65% over the next 25 years, a nightmare that can only be alleviated by massive public spending of \$533 billion.

"Libertarian" means that the Reason Foundation thinks the government shouldn't interfere in business activities, yet it also expects \$533 billion in government subsidies to support those activities. This money can only be raised through taxes, which the Reason Foundation abhors.

How reasonable is that?

Apparently based on the Reason study, the R-J article said daily traffic on I-15 near downtown will increase from 260,000 vehicles to 500,000 by 2030.

We wonder where these numbers come from. How can anyone predict future traffic?

No matter how "scientific" a study may be, it has to start with some economic assumptions, mainly that the trends of the past will continue without change.

Most traffic predictions seem to be based on the growth patterns of the last decade, when our city virtually doubled in size. Growth like that can't be maintained for long or we'd soon be passing Bombay and Mexico City as the world's largest metropolis.

Sooner or later, growth has to slow, stop or even reverse and when that happens, the roads we already have are going to be fine for our needs.

Maybe it's already happening. Due to our housing crunch, new home construction has slowed to a crawl. Fewer jobs are being created, so fewer people are moving here with their cars.

What's more important to our future: building new roads based on speculative gridlock or, say, shoring up our deteriorating schools, which are arguably in gridlock right now? Regardless of the state of our roads, who would want to move here if our school system stinks?

Roads vs. Kids. In a time of crisis, it ought to be an easy choice.

—G.C.