

Palm Bay leaders oppose potential county gas tax hike



Rick Neale, FLORIDA TODAY 5:55 p.m. EST January 8, 2016



(Photo: FLORIDA TODAY)

Thursday night, the Palm Bay City Council unanimously passed a resolution asking the Brevard County Commission to oppose any increase to the local option gas tax.

"I think that an item of this significance should go to the voters through a referendum," said Deputy Mayor Jeff Bailey, who introduced the resolution.

The gas tax would require a supermajority four-out-of-five vote by county commissioners. If enacted, an additional 6-cent-a-gallon gas tax would generate \$7.77 million a year for unincorporated Brevard and \$3.82 million a year for Space Coast cities and towns.

Palm Bay has nearly 110,000 residents, comprising roughly 20 percent of the county's population. County Commissioner Trudie Infantini and Andy Anderson's districts include portions of the city. Anderson was hired in May as Palm Bay's economic development and external affairs director.

"Their two votes alone would be able to block it," Bailey said.

Commissioners voted 3-2 last month to keep the gas tax on the table as a funding option, and a workshop takes place Thursday at the Government Center in Viera. Infantini and Curt Smith cast the no votes.

The Palm Bay City Council already is on record supporting a different avenue to finance road maintenance. Last August, council members unanimously approved a resolution encouraging the Brevard County Commission to place a half-cent sales tax referendum on the November ballot.

[Palm Bay calls for countywide half-cent tax for roads \(/story/news/local/2015/08/07/palm-bay-calls-countywide-half-cent-tax-roads/31307227/\)](/story/news/local/2015/08/07/palm-bay-calls-countywide-half-cent-tax-roads/31307227/)

Councilman Tres Holton, who introduced Palm Bay's sales tax resolution, said adding the gas tax to the mix would "muddy the waters" among voters.

As of this afternoon, Holton said city and town councils in Indian Harbour Beach, Malabar, Melbourne, Palm Shores, Rockledge and Titusville had joined Palm Bay by passing resolutions asking for a sales tax referendum.

During Thursday's meeting, Bailey cited a Space Coast Transportation Planning Organization survey that showed 82 percent of residents opposed a gas tax increase.

"This was the least-supported proposal of all the options that we have," Bailey said.

That June 2013 TPO survey interviewed 400 Brevard residents about their travel habits, potential funding for transportation needs, and related topics.

Gasoline was far more costly then than it is now, and a similar survey taken today could produce different results, TPO Executive Director Bob Kamm said this afternoon.

[How would you fix Brevard's roads? \(/story/news/local/2016/01/08/how-would-you-fix-brevard-county-florida-roads/78366252/\)](/story/news/local/2016/01/08/how-would-you-fix-brevard-county-florida-roads/78366252/)

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