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Benoit suggests county pursue road projects

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Riverside County should pursue transportation and other infrastructure projects to take advantage of the lower project costs, Supervisor John Benoit said during a State of the Fourth District presentation Friday.

Such projects have included breaking ground on the long-anticipated Interstate 10 interchanges, as well as a \$15 million investment under way in Mecca to pave five miles of roadway and install new lighting, sidewalks and a roundabout.

With the downturn in the economy, Benoit noted contractors are bidding lower than original estimates in order to secure the work -- a trend that's saving taxpayers millions.

"In the difficult times we find ourselves in, there's some bright light in this particular area," he said told the 40-person crowd.

"We should push as much of that work out as we can to get people back to work right now and to get the best value for the taxpayer's dollar in the process."

County officials also are looking at ways to create jobs.

Benoit and Supervisor Marion Ashley are working on a resolution that, if approved, would insert language into future contracts urging the employer to have 60 percent of its workforce local. The resolution is likely to be presented later this month.

Benoit's remarks were given to the Coachella Valley Mexican American Chamber of Commerce during a breakfast event at the IW Club in Indian Wells.

It is part of a series of such presentations Benoit is giving.

He also discussed the county's efforts to close a \$71 million budget gap and the \$11 billion-plus water bond that's expected to be on the November ballot.

Benoit has served the county's Fourth District since December. He was appointed to succeed the late Supervisor Roy Wilson to represent the county district that represents most of the Coachella Valley.