

Calhan wants to be part of transportation authority

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The town of Calhan wants in on the [Pikes Peak Rural Transportation Authority](#), a 1-percent sales tax initiative that funds road projects in the region.

On Wednesday, Calhan Mayor Blair Bartling cleared the first hurdle to make that happen. The PPRTA board unanimously approved Calhan's request to join the PPRTA's existing participants: the cities of Colorado Springs and Manitou Springs, the towns of Green Mountain Falls and Ramah, and unincorporated El Paso County.

But there are more steps to go. The governing bodies of those five jurisdictions have to give their approval. Then, Calhan voters must agree it's a good idea in the November election.

"I think we're ready to do this," Bartling told the PPRTA board.

The funding mechanism was created in 2004, when voters approved a 1-cent sales and use tax for specific road construction and maintenance in the participating jurisdictions, as well as regional public transportation. The measure passed with 55 percent of the vote. The town of Ramah was not part of the initial measure but joined in 2009.

Calhan, population 780 according to last year's Census and located east of Colorado Springs, decided not to be part of the 2004 effort, Bartling said. In 2006, Calhan voters rejected — by four votes — a proposed tax increase to fund road work.

Bartling said Calhan's leadership since has proven that the funding is needed and would be spent wisely. The town recently installed many sidewalks with Community Development Block Grant funding, he said.

"Residents are seeing we're doing upgrades, and I think they're willing to back us to keep projects like that going," Bartling said in an interview.

Pothole repairs and general street maintenance are sorely needed and not possible with the town's current road maintenance budget of \$10,000, he said. The money is used to add gravel to dirt roads and other work that Bartling describes as "hanging on." Joining the PPRTA would nearly triple Calhan's road budget.

"The people of Calhan presently are going to Falcon to do their shopping and buy their goods. We're hoping we can bring some of those tax dollars back home. We want our streets repaired," Bartling told the PPRTA board.

The tax in Calhan would generate about \$50,000, of which Calhan would receive about \$37,000 annually for road maintenance. Revenue is apportioned to PPRTA entities based on population. The remaining \$13,000 would go into PPRTA's capital projects fund, which is divided up for construction throughout the county.

Of PPRTA revenue, 55 percent goes toward capital improvement, 35 percent is for maintenance and 10 percent for transit. The capital portion of the tax ends in 2014, when the tax will drop to 0.45 percent unless voters renew the current rate. The maintenance and transit portions continue in perpetuity.

Voters likely will be asked next year whether to extend the capital tax portion beyond 2014.

The tax costs the average household about 42 cents per day. The money has paid for 24 projects through 2010, at a cost of \$218 million, according to Jason Wilkinson, PPRTA spokesman.

Among the improvements: the rebuilt Cimarron Street bridge, the new Austin Bluffs Parkway and Union Boulevard interchange and a portion of the [Woodmen Road/Academy Boulevard reconfiguration](#).