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Widening planned for Power Road stretch

By Blake Herzog
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MORE LANES: Cars travel along the curve on Power Road north of Williams Field Road in Mesa, a stretch that faces two options for expansion.

Tribune

Planned widening project



TRIBUNE

Gilbert, Mesa and Maricopa County are getting ready to complete the transformation of Power Road from a concrete ribbon between farms into an urban throughway between malls and an airport. [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/148337>]

The 2.7 miles of Power Road between the Santan Freeway section of Loop 202 and Pecos Road is much less developed than stretches just to the north and south, and much of it is just two lanes wide.

Power corridor of knowledge, possible jobs [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/148337>]

McQueen Road to close for bridge widening [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/146778>]

Gilbert to upgrade 1 mile of Higley Road [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/143651>]

Officials plan to start design work as early as next month on the estimated \$22 million project. They hope to begin construction in late 2011 and leave the two-lane road that Power is for much of the stretch a distant memory.

"In about 15 years, we hope to be able to say we remember when Power Road was a two-lane road," Mesa city engineer Beth Huning said this week during a joint meeting of the Mesa City Council and the Gilbert Town Council.

Besides easing traffic flow, a widened street would aid Mesa Mayor Scott Smith and other leaders as they seek to establish what they have dubbed the "Power Road Knowledge Corridor."

They hope a cluster of schools and medical uses along Power can help transform the area into a jobs center with cutting-edge research and instruction.

But the issue of what to do with the bend in the road as it goes past Arizona State University Polytechnic must be ironed out first, and it will affect the project's total cost.

The curve represents about a third of the total stretch to be widened. The lower-cost alternative would be to allow the three southbound lanes to follow the established curve, but build the three northbound lanes in a straight line connecting the two ends of the curve. That option would cost about \$21.7 million.

Officials estimate the cost would go up to as much as \$26.5 million if the straight-line option were eliminated and instead lanes were built along the curve. That would require taking out either part or all of an apartment complex located on Power Road north of Williams Field Road.

The less expensive "dual-corridor" option creates different issues for any future businesses that would be built along the curve by splitting the traffic flow. Given how much space the Phoenix-Mesa Gateway Airport and ASU campus take up on the east side of Power, there are likely to be more business outlets on the west side of the road, which lies in Gilbert.

Huning said Mesa is OK with either option as long as the costs can be kept down.

"On Mesa's end, we're ready to go," she said. "The direction we received from the Transportation Advisory Board is that either alternative would be acceptable as long as it did not exceed the cost of the lowest-cost alternative."

The Gilbert Town Council is expected to vote on the alternatives within the next few months.

The road's path will also determine how much the project will cost Mesa, Gilbert and the county. Officials expect about \$9.3 million in funding from the countywide half-cent sales tax, and the remaining cost will be divided among the three depending on which route is chosen and how much of it lies in each city.

Despite the narrowness of the road in the area, it is not as much of a traffic bottleneck, one motorist said.

Jason Hall, a real estate agent who lives in Queen Creek, said he drives the section of the road up to five times a day and said it usually doesn't present much of a problem, especially because improvements were made where Power and Germann roads intersect with the Union Pacific railroad tracks.

“Southbound there’s a little bit of a problem during 5, 6, 7 o’clock (p.m.), but not that much of one. You may be going 15 mph through there, but you keep moving,” he said.



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