

Loop 303 projects on track despite slow economy

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In the mid-1990s, a slow economy, stalled commercial [real estate](#) projects and a shortage of transportation funds sabotaged plans to build the West Valley's Loop 303 despite its inclusion in the county's 1985 transportation plan.

Though another economic slowdown is now curtailing growth once again, the future freeway is on schedule for construction and continues to be hyped as the Valley's next big retail and [office](#) corridor, according to experts.

"The indirect connection between the economy and freeway construction is a half-cent sales tax approved by (Maricopa County) voters in 1985," said Arizona Department of Transportation spokesman Timothy Tait.

In the 1990s, tax collections were insufficient to fund the much-debated Loop 303, setting the project back close to 20 years, he said.

Other factors such as moderate population growth and slowed real estate development put the 303 project on the back burner.

Today, mall [developer](#) Westcor has plans to build one of its largest projects along the future freeway in Surprise. Phoenix-based retail giant Vestar also plans to develop a massive shopping center in the area. Both companies announced that they would hold off the start on portions of those projects this year, though construction of basic infrastructure to support the projects will continue.

Despite those announcements, construction of the future freeway remains a priority and is set to start on time in 2012, with anticipated completion by 2017, said Brock Barnhart, community relations project manager for ADOT. The loop is expected to cost about \$1.5 billion to build, eventually connecting Interstate 17 to Interstate 10 via a six-lane freeway.

Maricopa County has a new transportation plan in effect, and development lulls such as those recently experienced by Westcor and Vestar were already accounted for in ADOT's construction timeline, Tait said.

Iain Vasey, vice president in the office group of brokerage Grubb and Ellis, likened future retail and office growth around the 303 to what is currently being experienced along Loop 101.

"Already there are projects coming out of the ground very quickly, like SunCor (Development Co.'s) Palm Valley (303) project," he said.

That company recently finished its first industrial warehouse in what eventually will become a cluster of more than 60 distribution buildings in Goodyear over the next 26 years. And, though Westcor will not start building the mall portion of its 303 Prsada project in Surprise this year, it will break ground on two power centers near the area.