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CG looks to future of transportation

By HAROLD KITCHING, Staff Writer

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EDITOR'S NOTE - This is the first of three articles looking at an update to Casa Grande's small-area transportation plan.

As Casa Grande continues to grow - and it will, even with the present slowing of activity - the main question for the average person is about getting there from here.

Right now, Casa Grande has Florence Boulevard as the main east-west route and Pinal Avenue as the main north-south highway. At this time of year with winter visitors, Florence is more than overburdened; the increase in a population that still works and shops in the Phoenix area strains Pinal at least twice a day.

As a step toward a smoother ride in the future, Casa Grande has been working on the city's small-area transportation plan, hearing about its update toward the end of last year.

The updated plan looks as far into the future as 2030, when the city is expected to have 260,000 residents, a great leap forward from the present 40,000 or thereabouts.

The true present population is really unknown. The city has banded about the figure of 38,000 to 40,000 and growing. The federal government says the 2005 population in Casa Grande was 32,855, while the state contended that it was 32,470. The transportation study by an outside consulting firm uses a 2005 figure of 51,000 people.

The 260,000 is still far less than the 390,000 people that the study consultants predict the city will have when its limits are fully built out. That is generally to the Gila River Indian Community on the north, east to the Overfield and Tweedy Road areas, south to wherever Eloy might be at that time, plus the Tohono O'odham Nation, and west to the Anderson and Fuqua roads area.

It will take a lot of planning and even more money to see smooth-flowing traffic a reality.

That will hold true with the areas of new housing, but also for commercial and industrial growth areas.

The study estimates Casa Grande provided 15,700 jobs during 2005. One chart projects that to rise to 121,400 by 2030, while another section says it will be 130,000. Most of those jobs will be filled by residents from the growth areas of

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- Sports - Arizona
- Sports - National
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- Valley Life
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- World News
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the city. The study shows 18,092 residences during 2005, expected to grow to 91,587 by 2030.

As with any projections, these are just that - educated guesses.

The study projects 260,000 residents by 2030, "based on about 3,000 dwelling units over that 25 years period (from 2005)."

However, during the December meeting of the Planning and Zoning Commission, Planning and Development Director Rick Miller told the commission that while commercial construction has begun a boom, statistics done that morning showed, "By the end of last year (2005) we did 1,700 new single-family home permits, and we're over that right now, but the single-family residential has drastically fallen off, basically starting in October, over last year."

How much that drop could skew the 2030 projections is not yet known.

A major part of the transportation plan is ways to improve connections to Interstates 8 and 10, creating a high-capacity loop. That involves Val Vista Boulevard as being a major seven-lane route as the north part of the loop and Montgomery Road being the western part, running from I-8 north to Val Vista and then on into the Indian reservation.

Other major east-west widened routes would be Selma Highway, parts of Florence Boulevard, Cottonwood Lane and Kortsen and McCartney roads.

The other wider north-south routes would be Tweedy, Signal Peak and Overfield roads on the east side, Peart Road, Pinal Avenue and Burris Road in the center and Bianco, Indian Valley, Anderson and Fuqua roads on the west.

Traffic interchanges on I-10 exist or are projected for Jimmie Kerr Boulevard, Selma Highway, Florence Boulevard, Kortsen and McCartney roads and Val Vista Boulevard. A new crossing over I-10 on Earley Road would be built.

Interchanges on I-8 would be at Hennessey, Trekell, Burris, Montgomery, Anderson and Stanfield roads.

A variety of bridges would be constructed over washes and streams.

The plan shows major improvements, either overpasses or underpasses, for streets and roads crossing the railroad tracks.

A major complaint from Casa Grande residents as the city has grown is the number of trucks now rolling through, especially those using Cottonwood Lane as a cut-over from Thornton Road to Pinal Avenue to go north to I-10.

The 2030 plan envisions taking most of the truck traffic off of Pinal, Florence and Cottonwood.

From Interstate 8 on the south, trucks would go up Trekell almost to Selma Highway, then loop east to an extension of Peart Road, going north on Peart to McCartney and then either east to I-10 or west to a new truck route on Burris Road to Val Vista and then back to Pinal to go onto I-10.

A Burris Road truck route would run north from I-8, looping to the west and then straight north to Val Vista, taking heavy traffic off Thornton Road.

Other north-south truck routes envisioned are Tweedy, Signal Peak and Overfield



roads on the east and Montgomery, Indian Valley, Anderson and Stanfield roads on the west. The east-west routes would be Selma Highway, Kortsen and McCartney roads, Val Vista and Florence Boulevard from the east to Peart Road and from the west to Burris Road.

"Heavy trucks and their impact on commercial and residential areas, especially some of the older residential areas of town, has been a concern, has been in the newspaper, " Michael Gorton of the Wilson & Company consulting firm said, "and we developed a 2030 truck route plan that's based on the network that would be built by 2030. Basically it's a functional classification network where it puts heavy trucks on the two-mile arterial grid and keeps them away from kind of the central Casa Grande area."

Next: Discussing the bottlenecks

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Jan, 03 2007

Nice job. You may know that Apache Junction also is studying a bus system.

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