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Pinal to launch toll road study

By Sarah Boggan
Tribune

The first-ever feasibility study looking at a toll road to link the fastest-growing areas of Pinal County to the East Valley has been commissioned. The study comes after years of discussion about solutions to ease gridlock in Pinal County and adjacent East Valley communities.

The study will explore the use of toll roads, partial toll roads and other possible solutions, said Jordan Rose, a landuse attorney and a member of the Pinal Partnership, a group made up of county stakeholders. The study also will determine whether traffic will financially support a toll road or a road with some toll lanes.

The \$200,000 study, expected to be completed in three months by an undisclosed national firm, is being funded by a private group, which wishes to remain anonymous, that is affiliated with the partnership, she said.

"We want to see the major roadways built sooner rather than later, and one option worth exploring is toll roads," Rose said. "We're considering a toll road as one tool in our toolbox."

The study will focus on an Arizona Department of Transportation alignment from U.S. 60 in the East Valley south to Interstate 10 near Eloy but will look at other routes as well, Rose said. The alignment runs east of the Williams Gateway area south to north of Florence and through the Superstition Vistas area and Coolidge to Eloy near state Route 87.

The Pinal Partnership plans to take the results of the study to the Board of Supervisors and if it shows tolls as a feasible way to build a road, the partnership will begin analysis and discussions with municipalities along the route, Rose said.

"The Pinal County Board of Supervisors has been talking about how to get ahead of the growth," she said. "Because the Board of Supervisors is talking about it so much, this group stepped up to fund the study."

Queen Creek Mayor Art Sanders said he applauds the group for stepping up to fund the study. He said anything that routes traffic around Queen Creek - for those who don't intend to stop there - is a step in the right direction.

"Back in the '60s we were able to put a man on the moon, and now we can't get a guy out of Queen Creek," Sanders said. "We just need some help. There isn't money out there so if a toll road allows for the private sector to step up and cover us for a while, we can use it."

County Manager Terry Doolittle said the study would give the county an "initial indicator" on whether to

study toll roads further.

"(The road) would be very beneficial if through this type of project or through ADOT moving forward with construction of a north-south freeway," he said.

He said the private group indicated a road could be open as soon as 2015 with construction starting in 2012.

"If everything continues to move forward, it would provide much needed relief," Doolittle said. "The impact is really seven to eight years down the road."

Rose said there are "a lot of private investors willing to come in and run a toll road if it's financially sound."

"Nobody's burning to have a toll road," Rose said. "What they want is roadways quick and if that means tolling or partial tolling, we'll consider it."

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