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Plans for major road improvements in CG carry a large price tag

By HAROLD KITCHING, Staff Writer January 04, 2007

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The latest projections say that to bring Casa Grande's transportation network over its 260-square-mile planning area up to a level to meet growth and demand by year 2030 would cost \$2.6 billion.

Yes, billion.

By comparison, Arizona this year is operating on a state budget of about \$9.6 billion. Casa Grande's overall budget is \$89.9 million. And, there was a lot of hoopla over the Legislature allotting \$300 million-plus to get some road projects speeded up.

And to make it worse, that \$2.6 billion for Casa Grande is in today's dollars, not accounting for another 23 years of inflation.

In arriving at the figure, Michael Gorton of the Wilson & Company consultants, doing the small-area transportation study, said costs of a new Montgomery Road expressway and Val Vista Boulevard as a northern crosstown route were included.

"All told," he said, "we came up with about \$2.6 billion in needed roadway capacity improvements. And this would include improvements on local, county and state facilities. That includes improvements to I-10 and I-8, would include potential new expressways and it includes all the local roads as well."

Where's the money?

A chart accompanying the plan update report shows that by 2030, the city can expect to receive:

- * \$132.5 million from a county half-cent sales tax for transportation.
- * \$3.2 million from the state's Local Transportation Assistance Fund.
- * \$61 million from the state Highway User Revenue Fund.
- * \$3.6 million in federal funding.
- * \$57.9 million from development impact fees charged on new construction, both residential and commercial.

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That leaves a deficit of more than \$2.3 billion.

Actual amounts are not really known, partly because, as City Manager Jim Thompson pointed out, "some of the developers are providing in their development agreements to build some of these arterials and other roadways."

Some of the major roads are the responsibility of the Arizona Department of Transportation and some are now county, meaning some money for improvements could come from those two entities.

No one yet knows how the rest of the shortfall will be resolved.

Of that \$258.2 million, an estimated \$60 million would go toward operation and maintenance of the transportation system, leaving \$198.2 million for actual construction.

Councilman Karl Peterson asked if toll roads were considered as a way of offsetting costs.

"We did not include that potential, but that's certainly an alternative for building some of these facilities," Gorton replied. "But we really didn't explore that. We focused on what we know is out there right now."

With a \$2.6 billion overall shortfall through 2030, the plan recommends \$204.2 million in six "cost-constrained" priority road projects for the city, mainly ones that would provide better access to Interstate 10.

"We wanted to alleviate congestion on core arterials, basically the downtown arterials and also arterials that are going to be including regional connectivity to new developments that are occurring out to the west, such as Copper Mountain Ranch or The Legends or the development that is going on in the Midway Road area," Gorton said.

They are:

- * Widening three miles of Florence Boulevard to six lanes between Peart and Hacienda roads, handled by ADOT, at a cost of \$13.2 million.
- * Widening 3.8 miles of Kortsen Road to six lanes between Pinal Avenue and I-10, handled by the city, at a cost of \$31.2 million.
- * Widening 6.5 miles of Pinal Avenue between Kortsen Road and I-10 to six lanes, handled by ADOT, at a cost of \$17.1 million.
- * Widening 10.5 miles of Val Vista Boulevard between Maricopa-Casa Grande Highway and I-10 to six lanes, handled by the city, at a cost of \$83.9 million.
- * Widening eight miles of Maricopa-Casa Grande Highway between Burris Road and Val Vista Boulevard to four lanes, handled jointly by the city and Pinal County, at a cost of \$43.8 million.
- * Widening four miles of McCartney Road between Pinal Avenue and Cox Road to six lanes, handled by the city, at a cost of \$15 million.

As Dan Marum, another Wilson & Company planner, put it: "There are a mixture of city of Casa Grande facilities, some of those routes are shared with Pinal County, and ADOT facilities. ADOT has consistently indicated to us in this study that the improvements on the state facilities, the timing and the funding for those



improvements are the state's responsibility, at least to organize the process for improving the state facilities.

"We've included them here as if the city were funding those facilities, and that in my opinion is a worst-case condition. We simply placed them here to identify the key needs for the community. The same can be said for routes that you currently or will share with Pinal County. We've shown the cost allocation all using Casa Grande revenue sources, not Pinal County revenue sources.

"So in my opinion this led to the worst case, and as funding partnerships are developed there would be many other projects that are city-sponsored projects that would come on this list and extend the ability of that \$200 million to fund other transportation improvements for the city over the next 25 years.

"I just wanted to clarify that we've shown the county partnership projects and ADOT partnership projects here and we've allocated only your funds, not potential county revenues nor potential ADOT revenues to these facilities."

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