

## Casa Grande to get depot from rail deal

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### **Union Pacific double-tracking pact to bring three Pinal cities, county money for train-crossing projects**

Casa Grande has approved its part of a \$35 million, four-government agreement that provides help from Union Pacific Railroad with new crossings needed for double-tracking between Yuma and Tucson.

In return for not opposing the railroad's double-tracking during hearings by the Arizona Corporation Commission, Casa Grande will receive money toward improvements, including encasing its water pipes near Anderson Road, and will be given the old railroad depot building on Main Street.

No money comes with the historic depot, long eyed for preservation. The agreement says the city and railroad "shall negotiate in good faith" for removing the depot from UP's right of way within a reasonable time, at city expense. It adds that "from and after donation to the city, the city shall fence off the depot as reasonably requested by UPRR and shall be solely responsible for all future maintenance and upkeep of the depot and fencing."

Out of the \$35 million, Casa Grande and the city of Maricopa will be given \$1.5 million each for initial design and engineering for the first two overpasses to cross the double-tracking out of the four eventual crossings required in the agreement.

The deal requires Casa Grande to begin that design and engineering within one year and start building it within 10 years, closing that street-level crossing or one in another location. The railroad and its predecessor company for years have urged closing of the Sacaton Street crossing downtown, but Casa Grande has not said which crossing might be chosen.

"We have not decided which one at this point," City Manager Jim Thompson told the Casa Grande Dispatch. "We are doing some analysis from our Small-Area Transportation Plan based on traffic counts, etc."

The remaining \$32 million, the agreement says, will be split among Casa Grande, Eloy, Maricopa and Pinal County for other crossing work, with provisions for added payment to Casa Grande if it annexes crossing areas now in the county. The agreement lists 27 crossings that will need work, or roughly \$1.185 million each. Not all of them would include overpasses.

Estimates given for the cost of full overpass crossings range from \$18 million to \$35 million each.

Thompson told the City Council during Monday night's meeting, at which the agreement received unanimous approval, that the money being received is higher than might be expected.

He said railroads normally are required to pay 5 percent of the cost of a "theoretical crossing structure" that is either above or on part of their right of way. "Theoretical," he added, means railroads could say a wooden trestle would meet the needs, thus limiting their payment.

"That amount could range, in the case of ones we've been looking at, in the area of \$150,000 upwards of \$300,000."

"So when you look at the amount that we're receiving, which is over a million dollars per crossing, it's substantially greater by entering into this agreement. I thank all the parties involved. It took quite a few meetings to get to where we are, but I think it's a great agreement. Right now, it's the best that we've ever seen in the state for any crossing associated with Union Pacific Railroad."

The 27 crossings listed in the agreements are:

-- Casa Grande - Thornton, Trekell, Cox, Sunland Gin and Montgomery roads and Sacaton, Florence and Hermosilla streets.

-- Maricopa - Porter, White and Parker, and Hartman roads. John Wayne Parkway, or Arizona 347, is under the jurisdiction of the Arizona Department of Transportation and will require a separate agreement but represents a high priority for an overpass because of the volume of traffic there.

-- Eloy - Toltec, Houser, Battaglia, Eleven Mile Corner and La Palma roads, Main Street and Sunshine Boulevard.

-- Pinal County - Rio Bravo, Ralston, Anderson, Ethington, Keeling, Peart, Picacho School and Missile Base roads and Park Link Drive.

"I think I need to recognize Pinal County Supervisor David Snider for all his efforts in this process," Thompson said. "If it wasn't for David, we probably wouldn't be where we are today. I think his diligence of bringing the groups together continuously served to ensure we stayed on track and tried to secure this."

Mayor Bob Jackson agreed, saying, "It's tough sometimes to negotiate with three different communities."

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