

Realignment of roads in ADOT's I-10 widening project to impact local area businesses

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The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) had a few new options to present to city council this week for the proposed realignments for Sunland Gin Road and the I-10 highway through Picacho as part of its I-10 widening project.

Within the next five years, the I-10 Highway will be three lanes in each direction all the way from Tucson to Junction I-8, and up to 10 lanes by the year 2030.

Last year, ADOT presented several options for the I-10 construction in the area to Eloy City Council members and how they would impact the city.

Some of those propositions made were for new, or merely improved, interchanges along the interstate exactly two miles apart from Tangerine Road in Marana MP 240 to I-8. Completely new interchanges ADOT had recommended for construction were: Moore Road (MP 238), Tortolita Parkway (MP 233), Aries Drive (MP 229), Park Link Drive (MP 224), Greens Road (MP 222), Picacho Highway (MP 213), Overfield Road (MP 202), Selma Highway (MP 197), and lastly Henness Road (MP 177) for the I-8/I-10 interchange. The location of an interchange Sunshine Boulevard and Toltec Highway has yet to be determined.

Existing interchanges have been suggested for improvements, including MP 236 in Marana, MP 226 in Red Rock, and Picacho Peak Road (MP 219) right at the state park. Those in Eloy that ADOT has also considered is the MP 211 interchange on State Route 87, the Sunshine Boulevard interchange at MP 209, Toltec Highway (MP 204), and a realigned Sunland Gin Road at MP 200.

ADOT will be building five lanes in each direction with an open median between over the next 20 years, and eventually the possibility of frontage roads on each side of the highway to allow access to adjacent properties. Those roads would be the responsibility of the city, or property owners to fund and lay down.

Currently under construction is the area between Tangerine Road to the Pinal County line at the Pinal Air Park, being expanded to six lanes (three in each direction) and will be complete in August, 2009. The second construction project also in the works now is from the Pinal Air Park to Picacho Road at the state park to be completed in spring of 2009. The section between Picacho to State Route 87 is currently in design and will start construction in 2010. The section between State Route 87 to I-8 is anticipated to go into construction in 2011.

Sunland Gin Road

One issue that council members had discussed at length last year was the proposed realignment of Sunland Gin Road about a quarter mile east of its current location. Concerns were that existing businesses such as the truck stops would be severely impacted and cut off from its customer base-truckers getting off the highway to fuel up. Council requested that ADOT consider a way to eventually get the road back onto its original alignment from the new interchange.

But on Monday, representatives with ADOT came back to Council expressing that such a plan would not be workable. Council's idea of using a curve linear road to swing back onto the existing alignment created a conflict with present traffic flow speeds, they said. A curved road would require traffic to reduce speeds from its normal 55 mph to 25 mph. It would also interfere with bringing in driveways and other accesses onto Sunland Gin.

ADOT's preferred plan for Sunland Gin is that when the interchange is moved, that Sunland Gin Road will continue on a tangent alignment across the UP railroad on an overpass bridge and would eventually align with

Overfield Road. Local roads stemming off the new alignment for Sunland Gin would allow traffic access to businesses and restaurants along the old Sunland Gin Road alignment.

"We expect all these improvements to be in place by the year 2030," Michael Kies with DMJM Harris said, consultant with ADOT.

Toltec Highway

A new Toltec Highway alignment was also presented to Council on Monday, recommending the building of an improved highway off to the side of the existing bridge. This would allow ADOT to build the new bridge without interrupting traffic during its construction. The new alignment would also give the road a better angle to cross the I-10, and better intersection angles at the ramps, representatives said. Access to businesses would be similar as they are today, they added.

Except for one, the Knights Inn located at 3945 West Houser Road. Interim City Manager Joseph Blanton and Mayor Byron Jackson questioned Kies as to whether there was another option that would not require the demolition of the inn. Kies admitted that they could mirror the recommendation for the other side of the existing bridge, but the construction would affect a McDonald's and a Chevron gas station.

"Based on the impacts that we see with those alternatives, we felt that there were less impacts on this side," Kies said.

"What's ADOT's solution in regards to the impact to the hotel?" Mayor Jackson asked. Kies said that ADOT had programs in place to provide fair compensation to business owners and to assist in relocation.

Recommendations for Sunshine Boulevard would be similar in reconstruction, with realignment to create improved crossing angle and intersection safety, as well as the inclusion of raised medians to reduce turning movement conflicts, as well as a slight realignment for Milligan Road at ADOT's expense.

I-10 through Picacho

Last year, ADOT representatives had presented two options for the interstate alignment through the Picacho area (see images on left). The city voiced favor for the second option, which would bring the sharp curves in the highway to a better, safer design standard.

"The reasons we've been told why the city was in favor of Option B was because ADOT could not come up with a timeline of when these interstate improvements would be made, and therefore following the existing alignments made sense because widening and improvements along the interstate could happen over time, and not impact the community greatly," Kies said.

But ADOT has come up with a third option, called Option C. This option would realign the freeway to follow the railroad through the community of Picacho. In doing so, they would be removing those curves on the existing alignment.

"By reducing the number of freeway of curves, we believe we'll be improving the main line safety," Kies noted, added that the new alignment would put the highway on level ground instead of slopes and embankments like it is on today, eliminating substantial length of elevated freeway and guardrails.

But this new option also has its impacts on the local community. It would most likely eliminate almost all of the private property parcels located in the narrow strip of land between the railroad and proposed freeway alignment, as noise reduction would become a major problem.

And expanding the new alignment to 10 lanes and providing new curvature would impact properties on both sides of interstate, approx. 70-80 parcels.

"What we hope is that eventually the city of Eloy would reconsider their resolution in regards to this corridor study that is in favor of Option B, and look at the advantages of Option C," Kies said.

If accepted, this project would start construction within the next few years. There is funding currently available to move the freeway under this alignment in the 5-year plan.

"So we're not talking about a 20-year alignment here. We'd be talking with people about relocating their businesses now, and not being on the fence for 10 years and waiting for ADOT to come and talk."

Due to the multitude of effects these plans would have on the local community, ADOT is holding a public meeting to get input from citizens on Aug. 21 from 5 to 7 p.m. at the Picacho Elementary School, 17865 South Vail Road, Picacho. A presentation will be made at 5:30 p.m., and ADOT staff will be in attendance to answer questions from the public.

For more information on the long range projects, visit www.i10tucsondistrict.com.