

Midvalley Highway route to be finalized by next May

Written by Mark Watson

Tooele County, along with federal and state transportation officials, plans to finalize a route for the Tooele County Midvalley Highway by May 1, 2008.

County leaders started working on the project back in 1996 and have considered three main routes. All of the routes would begin south of Tooele City at SR-36. Two routes would run east of Utah Industrial Depot on the west side of Tooele City, and one would run west of the Industrial Depot. Two of the proposed routes end up connecting with Sheep Lane near Deseret Peak Complex and then heading east directly to I-80. A third proposed route would run closer to Erda on Tooele's 1200 West out to I-80.

"We're looking back at some old studies and routes that have been suggested in the past," said Tooele County Engineer Jim Lawrence. "But these routes will probably change. We'll narrow it down to a few alternatives, have more public hearings, and eventually come up with one proposed route to submit to the Federal Highway Administration."

Although the Utah Department of Transportation finished construction on two new lanes on SR-36 from Tooele to the I-80 interchange in 2005, the highway is already considered "severely restrictive" for drivers, according to the national Transportation Research Board.

The TRB also places SR-112 from Tooele to Grantsville in the same category. Drivers on these roads experience a generally poor level of comfort and convenience because of high-density traffic, according to the study. Another problem area is Utah Avenue in Tooele & a road that connects with SR-112.

The TRB is a division of the National Research Council. Its goal is to promote progress and innovation in transportation through research. These studies are being used by engineering consulting firm Parsons Brinkerhoff to find the best possible route for the new Midvalley Highway.

The county is paying Parsons Brinkerhoff \$200,000 for an environmental assessment, which began in June and will take one year.

Tooele County Engineer Jim Lawrence said a new Tooele County Midvalley Highway could be built in phases as money becomes available.

"It is definitely something that UDOT and the Federal Highway Administration have interest in and consider a necessary project," Lawrence said. "Money may not be available now to build the entire project, but we need to get started with the planning. It has been a priority for a long time and we can build it in phases."

He indicated Tooele County would only pay about 20 percent of the cost of building the highway with the rest of the money coming out of state and federal coffers.

On June 13, Parsons Brinkerhoff conducted its first public scoping meeting. Company representatives and UDOT representatives have also met with city and county leaders. As the group gathers more traffic and transportation data, it will continue to hold public meetings and enhance the plan in the process.

Parsons Brinkerhoff hopes to submit a final proposal to the FHWA in the spring of 2008. The FHWA is scheduled to make a decision by May 1, 2008. If the FHWA finds no significant environmental impact & particularly on surrounding wetlands & the county and UDOT could begin to design and construct the highway. If impacts are determined to be significant, an environmental impact statement would need to be prepared and submitted.

Lawrence said the public can follow the process and make comments at www.midvalleyhighway.com. Another way to make comments is to call Pam Murray at (801) 288-3250.

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