

NEW 2-YEAR I-10 PROJECT

Ruthrauff-to-Prince stretch to be 4 lanes in each direction

Shelley Shelton Arizona Daily Star

The almost-three-year I-10 widening project may be a fading memory, but brace yourself for a blast from the past: Come fall a similar project will start up when a Phoenix contractor begins expanding the interstate from West Ruthrauff Road to West Prince Road.

The State Transportation Board on Friday awarded a federally funded \$76.4 million contract to Phoenix-based Pulice Construction for the two-mile, two-year job.

Pulice also oversaw construction of Marana's Twin Peaks interchange, which was completed last year.

The contractor has 60 days to get started. After that there won't be much impact on commuters for about two months, said Linda Ritter, an Arizona Department of Transportation spokeswoman.

But sometime between late October and early December, the Prince Road interchange of I-10 will close, and it will stay that way for two years as the freeway is widened from three lanes to four in each direction and the Prince Road interchange is completely rebuilt.

The interchange will be similar to the Twin Peaks interchange - like Twin Peaks Road, Prince will run above the freeway and railroad tracks.

The change is necessary, Ritter said, because the Union Pacific Railroad plans to double its tracks at some point.

Already, 40 to 60 trains each day go through town, often causing vehicles leaving I-10 via the Prince Road off-ramp to back up onto the interstate when a train is crossing.

Each of the project's two phases will take about a year. The first will focus on widening the west side of I-10, where eastbound traffic travels. Then work will begin on the east side of I-10, where westbound traffic goes.

The Ruthrauff interchange will stay open throughout the work.

"All businesses in the area will have access," Ritter said. "You will be able to get to them."

Though motorists will need to circle back to get to their destinations, they won't be driving through construction - freeway traffic will be routed onto frontage roads.

But people who run businesses in the area are worried.

Dave Christman, manager of the family-owned Prince of Tucson RV Park, 3501 N. Freeway Road, said the business rode out the last closure - when I-10 was widened between Prince and West 29th Street in a project that lasted from January 2007 until around September 2009.

The next project will be different because the work will be right in front of the 30-year-old RV park.

Because Prince will be raised 30 feet to go over the freeway, a lot of grade work and work on retainer walls will be right where Prince of Tucson is located, he said.

Christman is frustrated there is no law in Arizona that requires compensation for business losses due to construction.

"If your income is directly affected by road construction and you can prove that, then there should be just means to compensate you for that. It's only right," he said.

"You can't have a 30-year business fail because the roads are being improved in front of you."

ADOT works with Marie Miyashiro, president of Elucity, a consulting firm that acts as a liaison between affected businesses and ADOT. Elucity works to help them overcome issues that arise from construction.

"It's a smart move by ADOT to bring in a company like that because it can get passionate," Christman said.

I-10 Self Storage, 3273 N. Freeway, is another 30-year-old family business on the west side of the road that's bracing for the closure of the Prince on-ramps and off-ramps.

This project will be harder to manage because there won't be a direct way to get to the business from Prince Road, said co-owner Peter Herder.

During the last closure, I-10 Self Storage was one of four businesses that co-hosted a mixer for other businesses in the area so they could find ways to support one another.

Herder said he's glad the west side of the freeway is being done first. ADOT's preliminary plans call for reopening the off-ramp on that side of the freeway when it's finished.

"Once that's done, then the worst is over," he said.

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