

Published: 11.28.2005

City's road fee starts adding up

South, West sides generate much of revenue early on

By Tony Davis

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

During rush hours, Silverbell Road north of Grant Road is regularly packed with cars, many from subdivisions that have cropped up in recent years. So is Valencia Road from Park Avenue to Midvale Park Road.

Those areas could be in for some relief in the next year or so, but it won't be much.

Tucson's South and West sides, the areas where those roads lie, brought more money into city coffers than any other region during the early months of the city's fledgling road-impact fee program.

In a surprise to some city officials, their revenues well outpaced those from the Southeast Side, long expected to be the city's next big growth area.

The Southeast Side is likely to catch up or even take the lead in the next few years, however, when long-planned projects come on line, city officials say. These include La Estancia near Wilmot and Los Reales roads; Liberty Village near Pantano and Golf Links roads; and Pantano Overlook near 22nd Street and Pantano Wash. All number in the hundreds of homes.

Citywide, the impact fees raised more than \$1 million in the four months since July 15, when the city started collecting fees of \$1 per square foot on new homes.

The fee doubles on Jan. 16.

New home construction on the South and West sides fetched nearly \$400,000 in impact fees from July 15 to Nov. 22.

These two areas could raise more than \$2.3 million in impact fees in all 2006 if their growth continues at this pace.

New-home permits

● Permits granted within Tucson for new homes in the last four months:

● West: **235**

● East: **188**

● Central: **107**

● Southeast: **91**

● Southlands: **70**

But that will barely dent the \$5 million to \$8 million a mile tab to widen key roads such as Silverbell and Valencia.

Widening projects for both roads are in the proposed Regional Transportation Plan. But neighbors and city officials would like to get them going more quickly than would occur if authorities only relied on that plan's proposed half-cent sales tax, which will go before voters next May.

Traffic on both roads is getting worse, said Richard Kessler, president of the Elvira Neighborhood Association, and Debbie Hecht, president of the Tucson Mountains Association.

"The people who work over at Raytheon Missile Systems cut through our neighborhood so they don't go through all the red lights on Valencia Road," said Kessler, who has lived near Valencia Road and South Sixth Avenue since 1988.

"They've always done it to some extent, but in the last two to three years it's more prevalent," he said.

Hecht said Silverbell is becoming scary, particularly just north of Grant where it whittles down from four to two lanes.

It's going to be a tough choice for public officials to balance the needs of those regions, and the city will have to work as partners with Pima County and the state to accomplish something soon, said Jose Ibarra, the city councilman whose district covers much of both areas.

"We cannot afford to wait for the RTA to pass and the RTA money to come for Silverbell - by then it will be 2009 and the road will be dangerous," Ibarra said.

Attention also must be paid to congested Grande Avenue and Mission Road east of Silverbell, he said.

One option: to rework the Mission-22nd Street intersection to encourage northbound cars to drive east on 22nd to the Interstate 10 frontage road rather than continuing on Mission to Congress Street to reach Downtown.

Tucson's Southeast Side brought in only \$147,019 in fee money, compared with \$392,301 that came from the South and West sides, which the city lumps into a single region called West.

The East region raised \$296,436 in road fees, while Central Tucson raised \$144,910. The Southlands region south of the Southeast area raised \$91,657.

Barbara West, treasurer of the Elvira association, sees evidence of the South and West regions' high ranking as she drives to work each morning along Valencia toward Alvernon.

"It's just heavy. There's more housing and the kids are driving to school and the parents are driving kids to schools," said West.

Officials also must do something about the I-19-Irvington Road off-ramp, which backs up

southbound freeway traffic during evening rush hours, said David Densmore, the Elvira group's vice president.

"It gets so bad it comes to a complete stop on the freeway," he said.

● *Contact reporter Tony Davis at 806-7746 or tdavis@azstarnet.com.*

All content copyright © 1999-2005 AzStarNet, Arizona Daily Star and its wire services and suppliers and may not be republished without permission. All rights reserved. Any copying, redistribution, or retransmission of any of the contents of this service without the expressed written consent of Arizona Daily Star or AzStarNet is prohibited.