

<http://www.azjournal.com/>

## Budget Woes Keep ADOT's Project List Short

January 7th, 2009

By Tammy Gray-Searles

"I don't know what we're going to do, or where we can cut next," Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) Holbrook District Engineer Lynn Johnson remarked about the agency's outlook for 2009.

With the budget already slashed and more cuts expected in the upcoming fiscal year, which starts in July, few projects are planned. Johnson noted that even simple road maintenance and repair will be minimal. The district's maintenance budget has already been reduced by about 14 percent, with more reductions expected.

"Reading between the lines, I think it's going to get worse," he remarked. "It equates to services. Preventive maintenance is not going to get done."

Johnson explained that he would really like to see repairs made to Hopi Drive and Navajo Blvd. in Holbrook, but does not believe the funds will be available in 2009.

"It's like maintaining a house. When you leave something undone, eventually you'll have to pay up," he said.

One small hope that would allow ADOT to move forward on unfunded and underfunded projects is a federal economic stimulus bill that could put some money back into the agency's coffers. Johnson noted that ADOT has already submitted a list of potential projects that are already designed and ready to begin for consideration for stimulus funds. In the Holbrook district, those projects include improvements on U.S. 191 near Interstate 40 and Sanders, on I-40 at Black Creek Bridge in Apache County, on U.S. 160 near Kayenta and on U.S. 180 near the Concho junction. It also includes spot repairs on I-40 within the district.

In all, ADOT has submitted about \$1 billion in economic stimulus projects, with the Holbrook district projects totaling an estimated \$30.8 million.

According to Johnson, if the money is awarded, the projects will begin within 90 days. In addition to allowing the projects at the top of the list to move forward, it will also allow funding already set aside for those projects to be put toward the next group of projects on the list. One of those "next on the list" includes widening State Route 77 between Holbrook and Snowflake to include additional passing lanes.

Johnson explained that the project has moved forward on paper, with the environmental clearance being completed, but there is not enough funding to start actual construction work. If, however, the federal economic stimulus money becomes available to fund other ADOT projects, there is a good chance work on State Route 77 could begin, using funds that would have been spent on other road improvements.

"We're hopeful," Johnson said regarding the federal funding. "We're way behind on road work and this could catch us up."

ADOT does have two projects planned for the Holbrook District that are expected to move forward in 2009, regardless of whether the economic stimulus money is received. They include construction of the first round-about on the Navajo Reservation near Ganado at the junction of Highways 191 and 264, and the addition of left and right turn lanes on State Route 264 near Polacca on the Hopi Reservation.

"There's not much planned close to Holbrook," Johnson remarked. "There are some things we want to get done, like the paving on Hopi and Navajo streets, but we just don't have the money."

Johnson noted that the district has been finding as many ways as possible to save money so that the funds that are available can be put toward road work and maintenance, but there is little left to be cut.

"I just don't know what we're going to do," he reiterated. "We're patiently waiting (for the 2009-10 budget), and hoping for the best. but planning for the worst."

By Tammy Gray-Searles "I don't know what we're going to do, or where we can cut next," Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) Holbrook District Engineer Lynn Johnson remarked about the agency's outlook for 2009.

Local News