

Infrastructure Improvements Pique Developers' Interest in the Williams Gateway Airport Area

By [Molly D. Castelazo](#)

Phoenix, Arizona--February 8, 2006--Infrastructure improvements in the Williams Gateway Airport area in Phoenix's Southeast Valley have caught the attention of the development community, spurring development plans and causing land values to rise.

Mesa's Interim Director of Economic Development, Wayne Balmer, says that infrastructure improvements are two key factors that have contributed to booming growth in the Williams Gateway Airport area. Specifically, he cites the completion of the Santan Freeway (Loop 202), which would provide convenient travel access from Williams Gateway to the rest of the Valley, the widening of Ellsworth Road, and the rehabilitation of Williams Gateway's water and sewer services by the City of Mesa as factors that have led to rising commercial interest in land development in the area.

The most immediate transportation project is the completion of the Santan Freeway, which will run through the Williams Gateway area, connecting the U.S. 60 with the Loop 101. The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) hopes to open the remaining sections of the freeway (between Elliot Road and Gilbert Road) late this spring. The freeway is currently open between Baseline and Elliot Road and Gilbert Road and the Loop 101. The interchange at the Loop 202 and U.S. 60 near Hawes Road is scheduled to open in the spring of 2007.

In his recent state of the city address, Mesa's Mayor Keno Hawker outlined his vision for Mesa in 2025, imagining that "Williams Gateway is a reliever for Sky Harbor, with regular passenger service and thousands of cargo shipments coming through its customs office every year. Thousands of residents from throughout the Southeast Valley enjoy high-quality jobs at Williams Gateway, using the 60, 202, Williams Gateway Freeway, and newly built highways in Pinal County to reach the job center."

The transportation options that Mayor Hawker envisions for 2025 include the Williams Gateway Freeway alignment, which is currently funded to connect the Santan Freeway (Loop 202) near Williams Gateway to Meridian Road. That alignment is controlled by the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) and funded by Proposition 400, a half-cent county sales tax used specifically to fund regional transportation improvements over the next 20 years. Construction could begin in 2015.

In addition, plans are being considered for the Williams Gateway Freeway alignment to continue to the U.S. 60, connecting just south of Gold Canyon. According to ADOT Planning Manager John Pein, that segment is being considered by ADOT in a planning-level study. Pein says that at that level of study the Department is looking at a travel desire line, investigating where future demand for a freeway might be. There are currently no funds dedicated to moving forward with the Pinal County portion of the Williams Gateway Freeway.

In his 2025 vision, Mayor Hawker also referred to other newly built highways in Pinal County that would bring people into the Williams Gateway area for both work and play. Two transportation corridors in Pinal County are currently being studied by the Arizona Department of Transportation, including one that would run East and West (roughly along Hunt Highway) between the I-10 and Florence Junction. The second Pinal County corridor being studied currently by ADOT would run

North and South between Apache Junction and the Coolidge/Eloy area. Both studies are at the planning level; neither has programmed funding.

Funding for those projects would come from Pinal County, says Pein. And although no dedicated funds currently exist, Pinal County voters passed a half-cent transportation excise sales tax in November, 2005. According to Pinal County Supervisor Sandie Smith, writing in a December 29, 2005 article in the Florence Reminder, "The half-cent transportation excise sales tax . . . will allow us to continue to address freeway corridor planning, city/county small area transportation plans, Pinal County north/south transportation corridors and Pinal County east/west transportation corridors."

As commercial and residential development race ahead in the Williams Gateway Airport area, the challenge will be for infrastructure development to keep pace. But if plans are any indication, local governments and regional associations see what developers do: enormous growth potential, and are making necessary infrastructure plans to accommodate it.