

Road projects delayed up to six years

by Susan Anderson
Tuesday, June 23, 2009 5:25 PM MDT

Natrona County Commissioners heard a drastic story of delayed road projects in a briefing from the Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) on June 16.

The public can attend a similar briefing on Wednesday, June 24, at 5:30 p.m. at the WYDOT office, 900 Bryan Stock Trail.

"We were saying the train wreck is coming, but now the train wreck is here," said WYDOT District Engineer Jack Bell.

The bottom line is that Wyoming highways need \$5 billion worth of work. In 2009, the state anticipates spending \$460 million on construction. Bell warned that the extra \$200 million recently funneled to roads from the governor and the Legislature likely won't continue in future years.

The federal stimulus money totaling \$168 million is a one-time event.

What this means for Natrona County is a delay until next year for several projects, including the Casper West Belt Loop Phase 1 (grading and structures) and the West Yellowstone Highway Reconstruction from David Street to Spruce Street.

The major impact is in the future. Delayed until Fiscal Year 12 are the Casper Shoshoni Connector and Salt Creek Highway Reconstructions (\$15.3 million) as well as the \$3 million reconstruction of the CY Ave/Poplar intersection.

Further into the future, the Casper West Belt Loop Phase 2 (surfacing) is put off until FY 16, as are construction of a four-lane highway on Highway 220 (at the Narrows) and reconstruction of Poplar Street from Interstate 25 to CY Avenue, including the Poplar Street Bridge across the North Platte River.

Commissioner Barb Peryam was concerned about the delay to improving Poplar Street, questioning how work on a dangerous intersection could be put off until 2016.

"We can't put all the money on Poplar, can't let the interstate fall apart," Bell said. "We have to prioritize."

He said that the First and Poplar intersection is "functional, while not ideal."

Some highlights from the WYDOT presentation about District 2, which includes five counties in Natrona, Converse, Goshen, Niobrara and Platte:

- * In 2008, District 2 received \$50 million to repair and maintain 1,300 highway miles.
- * In 2009, the district is receiving \$68 million, including stimulus and special legislative money.
- * In 2010, District 2 is expected to receive \$70 million.
- * 23 projects are planned for Natrona County in the next six years.
- * Average project cost increased by 10 percent during the past year.