

## **POSSIBLE P3 PROJECT – INTERSTATE 15**

From the Nevada state line to the Utah state line, I-15 traverses the northwestern tip of Arizona for only 29.4 miles. This portion of Arizona is separated from the rest of the state by the Grand Canyon, isolating it and creating little economic benefit to the state. In fact, the only way to reach the Arizona stretch, by car or air, is to go via Nevada or Utah. There are no incorporated communities and virtually no businesses along the Arizona stretch of I-15, and only 1200 Arizonans reside in the vicinity.

However, I-15 is an important national route, connecting San Diego to the Canadian border in Montana. It is recognized as a Corridor of National Significance because it is critical to freight movement from the southern California ports to the central United States, and has also been selected by USDOT as one of six Corridors of the Future, as well as being part of the federally designated Canamex corridor.

The current Average Daily Traffic (ADT) for this segment of I-15 is 20,000-24,000 vehicles per day, of which 24% of the traffic is trucks. While the traffic count is not particularly high, the percentage of truck traffic is substantial. There is no viable truck detour due to geography and distances, making I-15 the only viable option for trucks through this region of the United States.

Within Arizona, approximately 12 miles of I-15 traverses through the Virgin River Gorge, one of the most scenic rocky canyon drives in the country. This stretch of narrow, winding roadway provides access to canyon country, trailheads and other tourism opportunities as well as serving the large numbers of trucks.

The Arizona stretch of I-15 is several decades old and is in need of rehabilitation. The most urgent, and costly, element of work is eight bridge rehabilitations that all cross the Virgin River within the Virgin River Gorge. All have been identified by ADOT engineers as deficient or near-deficient. Because of the difficult terrain, the work will be costly, estimated at approximately \$165 million. Safety features such as widened shoulders, enhanced guardrails, and signage are also needed.

Because I-15 serves so few Arizonans and is so isolated from the rest of the state, it is difficult to justify pulling limited dollars needed elsewhere for such expensive repairs. Nonetheless, for safety reasons, the repairs are crucial.

As a result, ADOT is considering I-15 as a possible tolled highway. Because it is tolling an existing interstate, ADOT must apply to the Federal Highway Administration for one of two “pilot” interstate tolling slots. Sending an expression of interest to FHWA would serve as a marker of interest to hold a slot, as several other states are also interested.

Very preliminary estimates indicate that modest tolls, such as \$8 per truck and \$1 - \$2 per passenger car, would likely generate the necessary revenues to cover the costs of rehabilitation and ongoing maintenance of the Interstate. Modern tolling technology would make it possible to exempt residents along the stretch from tolls. Detailed tolling studies could be undertaken while preliminary design and environmental work are conducted, and would therefore not delay or alter the pre-construction process. Beginning this year with \$3 million that has already been set aside for assessment, I-15 with tolling could be complete by 2017.

ADOT is currently engaged in conversations with FHWA and with our neighboring states of Nevada and Utah about the possibility of using a public private partnership to finance the construction and tolling to repay the investment. The Department is facing a challenge in that few other options are available for this expensive but critical work.

