

What's up with the Super Slab? Sharon Croghan

The Colorado Tolling Enterprise (CTE); a board consisting of 13 members, who also serve as the Colorado Department of Transportation Board, requested Prairie Falcon Parkway Express (PFPE) make a presentation to them on the status of the toll road.

Ray Wells, PFPE president, did not make an appearance at the 16 October 2008 meeting, instead a new management company representative, David C. Burnett, PE, Senior Project Engineer, for Merrick and Company, based out of Aurora, CO presented a brief and uninformative presentation to the CTE committee.

Aside for the new management company, the power point presentation only had a few new items on it: the first and probably the most surprising change to the multi-modal aspect of the project: trains, automobiles and utilities, was the addition of planes to the mix, making it a much nicer thing to say, plane, trains and automobiles. Wasn't that a B grade movie from 20 plus years ago? Mr. Burnett also was wise enough to increase the estimated costs of the project, but at \$2.87 – \$3.2 billion, he is still so far off the on the cost, it's hard to imagine any real effort is being put into an accurate estimate of costs.

How far off is the construction cost estimate? Early in 2006, CDOT announced road construction costs had doubled and later in the year suggested construction costs had again taken an enormous hike because of the increase in price for petroleum products and a shortage of other key resources necessary for the construction of transportation project. On that information alone, PFPE's initial estimate from 2005 of \$2.2 billion dollars must minimally be \$4.4 billion.

Somewhere along the way PFPE has also realized the property in the path of the toll road is not dirt cheap, uninhabited, waste land, but is in fact, a valuable asset which people are not going to willingly give up, Right or Way (ROW) acquisition for the project was increased from \$6.4 million or \$200/acre, to \$453-\$806 million. Approximately 32,000 acres would be necessary for a 1200' wide ROW, if they figure \$400 million for 32,000 acres that's \$12,500 per acre or \$25,000/acre for \$800 million. That is a more reasonable amount for a most property owners, but still a far cry from the value and loss of future earning potential for all the farms and businesses which will cease to exist if the road continues forward at its present location. Not to mention, the loss in property value to the majority of property owners along and near the road. The project won't take complete properties, just portions here and there, as necessary for the 1200' ROW.

Mr. Burnett emphasized, as we have repeatedly heard over the years, PFPE does not want to impact any commercial or industrial development near the toll road, but will leave that to local municipalities. Instead he clearly state, 'we will keep the development of any commercial or industrial business associated with the road **within the 1200' ROW.**' Thus, gas, service stations and other commercial business which would serve the traveling public, will not be viable alternatives for the property owner who can no longer use their property or are negatively impacted by the location of the road, rather all possible income generating facilities will be located within the 1200' ROW. Also note, people won't need to go into the communities along the route of the

toll road, because everything they need will be conveniently located, between the north and south bound lanes.

Just before the end of the meeting, Mr. Burnett requested direction from the CTE board as to how they should proceed to begin the approval process with the CTE board, to which the chairman of the CTE, Mr. Gregory McKnight, said "We have an exhaustive approval process which starts from the ground up, which will take years to complete. At this time, with no money, we are not very interested in pursuing a road project, which has little concrete evidence of meeting a public purpose or need." Mr. McKnight suggested Mr. Burnett should interact with staff for specific information on the process. To which, Mr. Burnett responded, in time we will have the studies done, which we believe, will prove the value of this project to the State in not only revenue generation, but improved air quality and reduction in traffic congestion throughout the Front Range.

None of the CTE board was buying what Mr. Burnett was selling. All who spoke, expressed skepticism over the claim of any positive impact on Front Range traffic issue from a toll road in this location, as well as questioning the financial feasibility of such a project.

Mr. Burnett stayed around after the meeting to speak with those in attendance who came to hear him talk, he was cordial, expressed a willingness to work with property owners and possibly adjust the location of the road, if necessary, to accommodate unique situations and properties. He also said, he would be actively answering questions posed on the web site for PFPE or phone calls to the company.

In short, the Super Slab road project is no further along in the process than it was some 20 years ago; it is still pie in the sky, a dream, a scheme, an idea at best. Not good news for those whose properties lie within the 3 mile corridor, as there is no recourse or compensation for loss of property value, nor any way to force Wells to make a decision to move forward with the plan or give it up.

Prairie Falcon Parkway Express web site is:
www.prairiefalcomparkwayexpress.com. Information about efforts to rid corridor residents of this burdensome project can be found at www.nosuperslab.com and www.stupidslab.com.