

Extension of Powers could be toll road

State highway planners name stretch as candidate for further consideration

By DEEDEE CORRELL THE GAZETTE

Highway planners have edged a step closer to turning the asyet-unbuilt northern extension of Powers Boulevard into a toll road.

A statewide study of roads to determine which would work best under a user-pay system recently named the east-side boulevard as a good candidate.

“It’s not a done deal, but it looks like it could be feasible,” said Peggy Catlin, acting director of the Colorado Tolling Enterprise, a board created by the Colorado Department of Transportation to finance, build and maintain toll highways.

State officials aren’t considering turning the existing part of Powers into a toll road; they’re focusing on the segment planned as a freeway from Woodmen Road north to Interstate 25.

That extension will provide another route out of Colorado Springs while diverting traffic from I-25.

Planners examined whether enough motorists would use the road to pay for it. If the state issued bonds to build the roads, the tolls collected during the next 30 to 40 years would have to be enough to pay off the bonds.

Powers and eight other major roads in the state made the cut, but another possible toll road in Colorado Springs did not.

Planners rejected the idea of a toll road through the Banning-Lewis Ranch, a 38-square-mile area from Woodmen Road to Fontaine Boulevard.

The development is expected to have 76,000 homes and as many as 175,000 residents in the next 50 years.

Catlin said the proposed road was removed from the list “because the growth wasn’t there yet.”

The next step is to conduct environmental assessments on the roads, then do a more detailed financial analysis of those that seem feasible.

The process could take another two years, Catlin said.

Meanwhile, construction continues on the extension of Powers Boulevard, which is divided into four phases.

c The first mile of the extension, from Woodmen Road to Research Parkway, was finished in late 2001.

c The second mile, from Research to Briargate Parkway, is expected to be finished this year. La Plata Investments LLC, the group that built Briargate, is building that section of the road.

c CDOT is building the next 3.2 miles, from Briargate to Colorado Highway 83. That section is slated for completion next fall.

c The final stretch, from Colorado 83 to I-25 via North Gate Road, doesn’t have a planned start date or a budget. That section will cost an estimated \$100 million.