

Palo Parado Road Moving Forward

November 2009 Update

Palo Parado Road improvement work has lain idle until recently when Union Pacific Railroad completed the work to improve their crossing at Palo Parado. Approximately 80 feet of track have been replaced and concrete pads have been installed between the tracks at the crossing. Now Santa Cruz County is moving forward with the road upgrade work from Caballero Court to two hundred feet west of the railroad right-of-way.

The County now has decided that the Public Works Department will complete the road upgrade work from the end of Caballero Court to 200 feet west of the Union Pacific right of way. The estimated cost to complete the upgrade work is approximately \$75,000. The County does not have the funds to complete the upgrade work and is asking developers, contractors, community organizations, and individuals to raise the funds to cover the cost.

First United Realty, Avatar Holdings, Morningstar Ranch, and Brasher Real Estate have committed to supporting the project and agreed to donate a total of \$50,000 toward the project. GRG Construction and Mike Karem have agreed to donate in kind services and materials totaling \$34,176 to the effort. However, the County is saying the upgrade work is short about \$25,000 and is asking organizations and individuals to raise the remaining funds.

A number of individuals in the community have offered financial donations and Baca Float Coalition has agreed to collect those donations and deliver them to the County to be deposited to the "Palo Parado Railroad Fund" account that has been established by the County Finance Director. The county has told us that a donation to this project can be tax deductible and they would provide a letter acknowledging the donation. Anyone donating should get advice from a tax advisor before claiming a tax deduction.

In addition, the Baca Float Coalition Board of Directors has voted to donate \$2,000 to help the road upgrade effort. BFC believes that Palo Parado Road is an important project to this community and wants to assist the county in moving this effort forward.

Donations can be mailed to the Baca Float Coalition, Post Office Box 4467, Rio Rico, AZ 85648, or contact Baca Float Coalition Treasurer, Ron Campana at our e-mail address bacafloatcoaliton@yahoo.com or telephone 520 281-8250 for information. Your check should be made out to the "Palo Parado Railroad Fund".

Once the county has achieved commitments to cover the cost of the work, they will schedule the project. The Public Works Department estimates that it will require about six weeks to complete the work and Palo Parado Road would have to be closed to traffic for part of that time. More information will be available once the county moves forward with scheduling the upgrade work.

The upgrade work will allow Santa Cruz County to officially accept the upgraded road and crossing into the county maintained road system. The county has already qualified for the ADOT funding program to install the railroad approved safety lights and gates at a cost of approximately \$250,000. That funding will come from the Federal Highway Administration through the ADOT 130 funding program.

In fact, in the past week Santa Cruz County has been informed that the Arizona Corporation Commission, at their September meeting, added the Palo Parado Road Railroad crossing to the 2009 Array for upgrading the crossing with railroad approved safety lights and gates. This is yet another step toward making Palo Parado Road an all-weather crossing.

Palo Parado Road still has a long way to going before it is improved to an all-weather crossing. Some may believe that the effort is moving to slow and not much is being accomplished, but consider that Palo Parado has been addressed as an important issue for the residents and property owners in Northeast Rio Rico many times in past years, but has never developed into a working solution to improve the crossing.

What is different today is that the Baca Float Coalition was formed as a community action organization funded by members, who added their support and voice to the effort. Baca Float Coalition is working every day to keep the issue of Palo Parado in front of the county and our elected representatives. Baca Float Coalition has been lobbying local, state, and federal elected officials through personal contacts and letters addressing the importance of the Palo Parado Road crossing. With community involvement and support, progress is being made.

Our congressional representatives, Congressman Grijalva and Congresswomen Giffords, have submitted funding request for the Palo Parado Road through the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. The committee will be considering the Transportation Re-Authorization Act for a vote sometime in December 2009. We are hoping that Santa Cruz County will have an advocate in Congressman Grijalva and Congresswoman Giffords when those requests are addressed.