

The Salt Lake Tribune

Developers propose freeway deal - Would sell rights of way to ease commute for new homes

By Brandon Loomis

Article Last Updated: 02/23/2008 01:30:24 AM MST

Three landowners with a major stake in developing the southwestern Salt Lake Valley have essentially donated \$60 million or more in rights of way for a freeway to ease the commute there.

Kennecott Land Co., Sorenson Development and Development Associates have agreed to sell the land to the Utah Department of Transportation and then return the proceeds when the proposed Mountain View freeway is built, House Speaker Greg Curtis announced Friday in a Capitol news conference.

The contract is not yet finalized and inked, but a UDOT spokesman said the total acreage is between 250 and 300.

"We've taken yet one more impediment out of the way," said Senate President John Valentine, R-Orem.

The state likely will spend \$560 million to build this segment of highway, and up to \$2.5 billion on the entire roadway planned to run through West Valley City along 5800 West and link to Interstate 15 in Utah County, said Curtis, R-Sandy. The state is finishing an environmental study of the corridor, the northern portion of which has encountered opposition from environmentalists and, this week, the Granite School Board on grounds that it would increase pollution near several schools.

The deal announced Friday affects only the southern 10 miles of the 43-mile freeway, and would be part of the project regardless of whether UDOT sticks to the 5800 West alignment farther north or shifts to 7200 West.

Curtis thanked the companies for their corporate citizenship, then ended the news conference when a reporter asked whether their companies would gain by providing better access for new homeowners.

"Will people want to live in an area that has a good quality of life? Absolutely," Curtis said, blocking attempts to get responses from the companies. "They're going to build the homes because we're going to have more children and grandchildren."

After the news conference, Kennecott Land president Don Whyte said the freeway donation is a win-win proposition for his company's Daybreak development and for the state.

"We obviously believe it's good business," he said. "It allows us to follow through with the development as we envisioned."

Officials at the news conference also asserted that a transit component - dedicated bus rapid transit lanes down 5600 West - would accompany the freeway when it opens. Utah Transit Authority general counsel Bruce Jones later confirmed that the agency expects to open the unimpeded bus line in conjunction with the freeway, as a precursor to a possible light rail line.

The Sierra Club, which has led opposition to building near the schools and has insisted that transit line come first, said it's no surprise that developers would participate in the project.

"We've known for a long time that this has been a development-driven project, ever since Gov. Leavitt announced the Legacy Highway plan back in 1996," said Marc Heileson, the group's regional representative.