



Arizona Daily Star

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I-10 project is at hand; better get used to it

Our view: Patience will need to be in ample supply for dealing with three-year closure of major Tucson traffic artery

One word encapsulates what drivers trying to get from here to there via Interstate 10 need to remember for the next three years: patience.

Adopt it as your mantra. Repeat it often. Make the word and the approach part of your inner being. Absorb its peaceful qualities.

And then figure out a different way to get where you want to go.

It's been hard to avoid information about the project. The plans have been covered extensively in the news, the Arizona Department of Transportation has run ads and held public meetings and, signs are going up along I-10 and I-19.

But there's no way around it — driving along I-10 as it curves through Tucson is going to be difficult, to say the least. Construction began this weekend with the complete closure of westbound I-10 and the rerouting of all westbound traffic to the frontage road. The same will happen with eastbound traffic next weekend.

The entire stretch of I-10 from 29th Street on the south to Prince Road on the north will be closed from 10 p.m. Friday, June 29, through noon Sunday, July 1.

And after July 1, drivers will find exits from 22nd Street through Prince closed until the spring of 2010. Local traffic will have to get off eastbound I-10 at Prince or westbound I-10 at 29th Street and use the frontage roads. Westbound drivers won't be able to exit until Ruthrauff Road, one exit north of Prince.

It won't be pretty. But it's the best answer for adding much-needed lanes to I-10. Instead of three projects that would have spanned 10 years, ADOT decided to rip the bandage off all at once, figuratively speaking: The project will be going full bore for three solid years to get the work done as quickly as possible.

Traffic engineers from Tucson and ADOT have come up with plans for:

What to do if there's a wreck and emergency vehicles need to get to the highway.

How the frontage roads will be able to handle the thousands of cars each day.

What to do if drivers try to cut through neighborhoods.

How to handle a major wreck that closes the highway.

And how to tell drivers what to expect along the construction zone.

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Traffic blog

Star transportation reporter Andrea Kelly will use this space to post daily updates on I-10 lane and exit closures, as well as other snarl-inducing road work and closures.

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But no amount of planning can prepare Tucson drivers for how this massive construction project — at \$200.3 million, it's ADOT's most expensive single contract to date — will affect our daily lives.

Trip times will increase. Drivers will be confused, people will be frustrated. Workers will be doing dangerous jobs in tight quarters.

So it comes down to patience.

The theory of patience applies to employers who have workers dealing with suddenly longer commutes. Maybe allowing employees to change their schedules to avoid rush hour or work from home makes the most sense. It will take patience to find the right solution.

Patience for commuters means maybe trying one of the shuttles running from Marana to Downtown or car-pooling with others to school or work. Patience means being ready for traffic delays and leaving earlier to get where you're trying to go.

Crews will be working on seven cross-street bridges along I-10 throughout the project, which means traffic will get even more hectic at specific spots, which will require even more patience.

ADOT officials and their representatives have been contacting rental-car companies, trucking associations and Internet services like Mapquest to try to make sure people seeking directions around Tucson are aware of the closed exit and entrance ramps through the city. But we're guessing patience will be needed here as well.

Patience will go a long way toward keeping drivers and highway workers safe. Eventually the new routines will become normal — and in three years we'll be urging everyone to have patience as the road barriers come down and drivers again get used to traffic getting on and off I-10 as they travel through Tucson.

We look forward to that day. In the meantime, take a deep breath and be patient.

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