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Section:

Business

By Shelley Shelton

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You can get where you need to go, but that doesn't matter if people think it's a mess.

That's the problem confronting many Downtown businesses off the beaten path of Interstate 10.

Not only are those businesses affected by people afraid to use the freeway, but they also are affected by people who think Downtown is impossible to get to because of other road projects, such

as the Fourth Avenue underpass and the re-configuration of Oracle Road at Drachman Street and Main Avenue.

The Metropolitan Tucson Convention & Visitors Bureau sponsored a seminar Tuesday morning to help those businesses use some of the information that has helped frontage businesses in the face of ongoing road work and public fear of traveling through it.

Among others, Marie Miyashiro-Collins, the lead

consultant for the I-10 frontage businesses, and Jim Glock, director of the Tucson Transportation Department, gave short presentations and answered questions from concerned citizens and Downtown business owners.

"The issue is not the construction. The issue is the perception," Miyashiro-Collins said.

She gave an abbreviated version of the presentation she has given to frontage road businesses and passed out information packets with

the same kinds of tips she has offered to those businesses, 85 percent of which report they are doing as well as or better than they were before the I-10 widening began, she said.

Much of the frontage road business' success is due to the way the proprietors have learned to talk to their customers about the construction, Miyashiro-Collins said. It's important for businesses to convey that access to their

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establishments is not blocked.

"Traffic on the frontage road is good for traffic for Downtown," Miyashiro-Collins said.

Glock outlined current and upcoming road projects in the area immediately surrounding Downtown, saying the city Transportation Department is trying to limit its activity to two big projects at a time. Currently, those projects are the Fourth Avenue underpass and the intersection of Oracle, Drachman and Main.

Plans are afoot to rework

the so-called Five Points intersection at South Stone Avenue, South Sixth Avenue and 18th Street so that Stone and Sixth will be two-way streets.

Responding to an audience question about why the city chose to do all these things while the freeway project was going on, Glock said it was a matter of doing it when funds were available.

Despite road work that would appear to choke off entrances to Downtown, detours around the usual routes take only an extra turn or two, said Chris Early, owner of Chris' Cafe in La Placita Village, 110

S. Church Ave.

The biggest change that Early has seen is a loss of foot traffic, she said. Unlike other businesses that need to direct callers clearly on how to get to the sites, her business is not the kind that people call but rather it's one that people stumble across while Downtown.

Even so, she said, the city's awareness campaign is "an opportunity to let people know this is happening, and it will make Downtown better."

► Contact reporter Shelley Shelton at 434-4086 or sshelton@azstarnet.com.

GETTING AROUND

Information on how to get to, through and around Downtown during road work in the vicinity:

- Downtown Construction Information Line: 622-9000
- Web site: www.knowyourwaydowntown.info
- Radio: 1630-AM

I-10 widening information

- Hot line: 327-6444 or 1-877-961-1010
- Web site: www.i10tucson.com or www.az511.com
- Traffic cameras: www.transview.org