

Cori Takemoto Williams/The Arizona Republic

Road crews lay down rubberized asphalt on Loop 101 south of the U.S. 60 interchange. The material is more durable than other types of asphalt and also reduces noise on freeways.

A bounce in our step

Valley likes its asphalt rubberized

By Meghan Moravcik
The Arizona Republic

Residents have noticed how much quieter the newly paved Valley freeways are, and industry experts think this could spark a boom in the rubberized-asphalt industry.

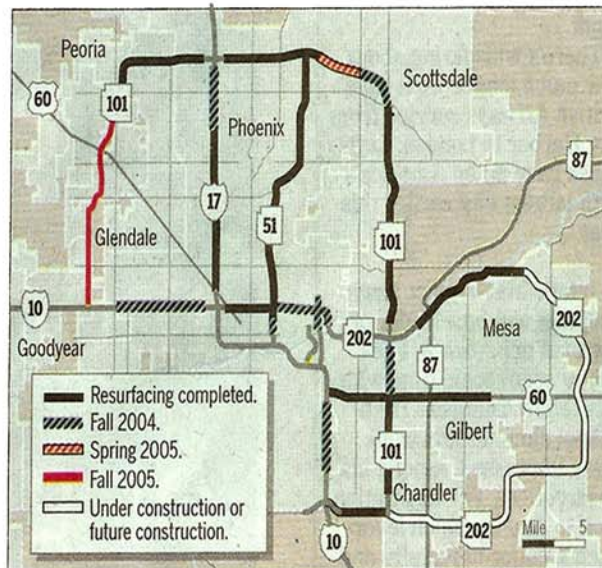
Rubberized asphalt has been used on rural roads in Arizona for decades because of its high durability. But when it started being applied to freeways in small projects, people began noticing another benefit, said Doug Nintzel, a spokesman for the Arizona Department of Transportation.

"People were noticing that they were quieter freeways," Nintzel said. "Suddenly, there were a lot of fans of rubberized asphalt, and people began asking if we could use it in their areas."

Although this type of asphalt always has had benefits, such as the higher durability, the public's support is what will expand the business of rubberized-asphalt paving, said Mark Belshe, asphalt rubber manager for FNF Construction, Inc., one of the companies contracted for Maricopa County's Quiet Pavement project. FNF has

Quieter roads

The use of rubberized asphalt has grown rapidly in the Valley.



Source: ADOT

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contracts worth more than \$16 million to apply the asphalt as well as doing other roadwork.

"The people that have been involved in the asphalt rubber business have always tried to sell it for its superior engineering qualities," Belshe said. "But what's happened now is it's being recognized for its noise-reduction qualities, so the public has gotten behind it."

Rubberized-asphalt paving accounts for only about 10 percent of FNF Construction's revenue, but Belshe said he expects that percent-

age to increase as public interest grows.

Currently, the \$34 million project is set to be finished in the fall of 2005 and will cover about 115 miles of Maricopa County's freeways.

About 70 percent of the area's freeways will be surfaced in rubberized asphalt by the end of the project. But that doesn't mean the construction companies won't see future revenue increases from the boom, said Rob Bottcher, vice president of Meadow Valley Contractors, Inc., the other company contracted for the project. Its contract is worth \$8 million.

"It's just like any other pavement; it will have to be removed and replaced over time," Bottcher said, adding that this is where future revenue rises would come from.

Arizona is one of a few states conducting research to determine how long the noise-reduction benefit lasts. Tests done before and after the freeways' paving have shown about a 50 percent reduction in the noise level caused by tires on the roads, Nintzel said. More results will be analyzed soon.

But for now, many residents seem willing to deal with construction and detours if it brings quieter freeways.

"When you're driving, you can definitely tell a difference (in noise level)," said Gilbert resident Noel Couch, who works near Loop 101 and Indian Bend Road. "I don't like them shutting down the highways (for construction), but I know they have to."

Sections of freeways that are being paved often need to be shut for an entire weekend because it takes hours for the new asphalt to harden enough for vehicles to drive on it.

"As much as we don't like to close the freeways on the weekend, a lot of people are cutting us some slack because they like the results," Nintzel said.

Scottsdale resident Marianne Ashton said she likes the results of the rubberized asphalt, but it's having a small effect on her driving.

"It makes me feel like I can drive a lot faster," she said.