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Private-public partners could benefit from new road

by Carol Crump

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Several thousand acres seven miles northwest of Casper is on its way to becoming one of the county's hottest business development areas.

The location juxtaposes 5,100 acres of the Casper/Natrona County International Airport property that includes a business park, 700 acres that make up the Casper Logistics Hub, a foreign trade zone and railroad and highway access.

The latest project, a \$1.5 million Business Ready Community grant application to pave Morgan Street, is the newest in a succession of public-private partnerships in and near the airport.

The county project that will pave the road that connects Highway 20-26 to the airport's business park also will benefit the privately developed Casper Logistics Hub.

"Ours benefits them; theirs benefits us," said Airport Manager Glenn Januska.

Morgan Street initially was paved during the World War II years of the Casper Air Base with four inches of pavement without a base. The old road won't hold up for some of the heavier and more frequent trucks that already are serving some of the new uses in the growing business park.

A new fuel farm storage area and expansion of the freight services provided by FedEx are in the works. Better infrastructure also will help Januska market the airport's business park.

The park, which is situated approximately between the airport and the foreign trade zone, already is the largest revenue source for the airport. The business tenants are self-sufficient and don't fluctuate with the airline industry.

"They help keep the rates and charges lower for the airlines," Januska said. "We haven't had a rate and charge increase in 13 years."

If approved by the Wyoming Business Council, the Morgan Street project will redo the pavement on the road that runs through the airport property to where it turns into a graveled road that connects to 6 Mile Road. The county's 6 Mile Road connects Highway 20-26 with the Casper Logistics Hub, which includes the Bishop Rail Park.

One of the first uses for the paved connection between the airport and the hub could be trucking jet fuel that comes in by rail car to the airport's fuel farm for storage.

The paving will provide another access for the hub, but not a bit of the Morgan Street grant will be spent on the hub's property. The hub is a private development created for transloading, trucking, erecting, storage, warehouse and switching.

Fifty acres recently were set aside as a secured storage site for wind components. According to hub spokesman Bob West, the hub is for businesses that need rail service.

"The choice for businesses that don't need rail is the airport business park," he said.

Like the proposed Morgan Street project, the improvements to 6 Mile Road and the industrial railroad spur that made the Casper Logistics Hub possible also were public-private partnerships.

The Wyoming Department of Transportation's Industrial Road Program provided \$2 million of the \$4 million that improved the intersection of 6 Mile Road and Highway 20-26. Natrona County and the Casper Logistics Hub partnered with WYDOT on the road project at \$1 million each.

A \$1.5 million Business Ready grant to the county created the 8,500-foot industrial lead track or siding from the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad line.

The siding is now county-owned, with Energy Transportation as partners to handle the heavy cranes and Bighorn Divide and Wyoming Railroad of Riverton managing the switch yard.

In the future, the old CN&W right-of-way could be used to put the county's 6 Mile Road through to County Road 121. The foreign trade zone also could be expanded to include the business park or the hub.

"Five years from now -- I'm not sure how it will come together, but it will be really exciting to work with the opportunities we all see in this area," Januska said. "Even the aerial map will look different."