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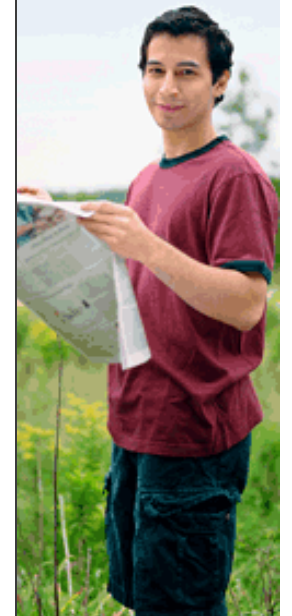
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# Home builders unfazed by delay in dam bypass

## Developers have little doubt investment will pay off when road complete

By [JENNIFER ROBISON](#)  
[REVIEW-JOURNAL](#)



Builders are buying land in Arizona to build bedroom communities for Las Vegas. This photo taken in December 2004 is looking south toward Kingman. Photo by [Jeff Scheid](#).

For Las Vegas home builders seeking affordable property, northern Arizona is a promised land.

As prices for vacant residential parcels in Southern Nevada spiraled toward \$1 million an acre in 2004 and 2005, local developers looked just south of the Silver State's border. There, on vast tracts of empty dirt selling for about \$50,000 an acre, developers could build less-expensive homes for people priced out of the Las Vegas housing market. The catch: All those plans rely on the completion of a \$240 million Hoover Dam bypass bridge over the Colorado River. The bridge would place commuters within 45 minutes of Las Vegas.

So when the Federal Highway Administration announced Thursday that completion of the bypass would face a two-year delay from 2008 to 2010, developers temporarily lost the crucial link that makes their Arizona projects feasible.

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But the postponement doesn't doom residential development in northern Arizona, say builders and real estate watchers.

"It's just delaying the inevitable," said Todd Tarson, a Kingman, Ariz.-based Re/Max broker and immediate past president of the Kingman/Golden Valley Association of Realtors. "Obviously, people would like to have the bridge open today, but that's not the case. People know that each day is one day closer to that (bypass) opening, and when it happens, that's going to mean more interest in their property."

Tarson said the delay, which resulted from wind damage to construction cranes in September, could even help builders by providing them with more time to plan infrastructure systems that officials in Mohave County, Ariz., find acceptable.

Local developers with land in northern Arizona agreed that putting off the bypass would have little effect on their proposals.

Bill Marion, a spokesman for Rhodes Homes, said the builder didn't have any immediate plans for large-scale development at Pravada, a 6,000-acre, 30,000-home master plan near Kingman, or The Villages at White Hills, a 2,727-acre community with more than 20,000 homes planned east of Bullhead City, Ariz.

Rhodes has model homes at Pravada, and the builder is accepting reservations for houses, but there's no definite time line for first move-ins, Marion said.

Rhodes is still working with Mohave County officials to obtain permits for Pravada, and The Villages at White Hills "is not at the development stage at all," Marion said.

"I don't think the dam delay is going to be an issue," he said.

Leonard Mardian, a Las Vegas businessman who plans to develop 47,000 acres of land in White Hills, Ariz., 27 miles south of Hoover Dam on U.S. Highway 93, said the bypass delay could help his project, called The Ranch at White Hills.

"We were planning on having our houses ready sometime in late 2009," Mardian said. "Even though the bridge would be great, it's not necessary (that it open by 2008) to make our plan work."



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Mardian said an \$85 million, four-lane highway from the bypass to his master plan won't be complete until 2009, so even if the bridge opened on schedule, the roadwork essential to bringing residents to The Ranch at White Hills wouldn't be ready.

Mardian is also banking on heightened activity within the Las Vegas real estate market. Home sales fell and appreciation eased in the Las Vegas Valley in 2006, but by 2009, Mardian said, he expects local sales and prices to have revved up significantly. That will translate into more buyers for The Ranch at White Hills.

"We feel that the market in Las Vegas will be completely out of land by 2009, which will put our property in a position that's perfect," he said. "(The delay) does have an effect, but only in the sense that we'll probably make a lot more money. Every year, our property grows at more than \$100 million (in value) just with us sitting on it."

Tarson agreed that the bridge's setback won't hurt rising land values in northern Arizona. It will be tough to sell home buyers on the commute to Las Vegas until there's an actual bypass that can make the shorter distance a reality, Tarson said, but investors will flock to the region in anticipation of the bridge's eventual opening.

"People will want to experience that drive before they buy, so (the delay) could slow down residential interest," Tarson said. "Investors don't need the bridge to be done. They'll use their imagination to say, 'I'll buy this property today, and when the bridge is done, it'll be worth more money.'"

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