

Cities get tour of Gateway plan

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LACEY — Business leaders were excited but anxious Wednesday as a developer unveiled plans for Lacey's 200-acre Gateway project, anchored by the Cabela's outdoor store under construction at Interstate 5 and Marvin Road.

While the retail, residential and office project will bring Lacey more tax revenues, some business leaders at a luncheon at Saint Martin's University said traffic congestion and securing enough water to support the development could be challenges for Olympia developer Tri Vo.

"It's an exciting project; I'm positive on the thing," said David Schaffert, president and chief executive of the Thurston County Chamber of Commerce.

2 MILLION SQUARE FEET

Though Vo envisions building up to 2 million square feet of office space on the site, Schaffert said the development might not hurt downtown Olympia's popularity. The estimated 2 million to 3.5 million annual visitors to Cabela's could expose tourists to downtown Olympia's attractions, Schaffert said.

"Downtown could be the answer to what to do after you've visited Cabela's," he said.

Vo expects it could take 15 years to complete the development of Gateway, starting with the Cabela's opening around Thanksgiving of this year. He plans to eventually construct 1 million square feet of retail,

larger than Westfield Capital mall, and up to 500 units in residential towers. No other Gateway tenants have been announced.

"Keep your ears to the ground," Vo project manager Michael Davolio told an audience of about 150 at the university's Worthington Center. "We expect to be making some announcements soon."

Vo was out of the country. The luncheon was billed as his way of thanking Lacey city officials for their support of the development.

TRAFFIC

Lacey Mayor Virgil Clarkson acknowledged that traffic could become a problem unless highway improvements are made near the development site, including a hoped-for I-5 interchange at Carpenter Road. The city also seeks funds to study upgrading the Marvin Road interchange that serves Vo's Gateway development site.

Tumwater City Councilman Pete Kmet said he didn't think a new Carpenter Road interchange was guaranteed for Lacey. He said state Department of Transportation officials closely examine interchange requests out of concern for interrupting the flow of Interstate 5 traffic.

"Anything that might interfere with the mainstream traffic on the highway is something they frown upon," Kmet said. Still, of the Gateway project, Kmet said, "It's a huge, dynamic project that will be a tremendous asset for Lacey."

Water availability could be another issue as building proceeds, said Lacey City Councilman John Darby.

But Darby said Vo is committed to using as much recycled water as possible in the development. Darby said Lacey has been appealing to state officials for water rights for 13 years.

"We believe we have everything in place to get water rights processed," Darby said.