



## New casino underground city development plan

Nearly six months ago, a team of Pinnacle Entertainment's top executives freely discussed the future of the new \$400 million Laclede's Landing casino development project during a Q1 earnings conference call.

Shortly after Steve Capp, the company's chief financial officer, bid on a good morning and offered "short words about balance sheets and liquidity," an unidentified company representative spoke about a 1,000-foot pedestrian tunnel connecting downtown to casinos, a major component of a luxury complex that received little attention.

"Imagine if 65,000 people left the Rams game," the congressman began. "We are building a pedestrian tunnel that leads directly to the stadium. If 10 percent of people want to get out of the stadium and go to our casino, that's 6,500 people.

"We purposely put a casino between the Grammys stadium and a lot of parking lots. So people will come through the tunnel to the parking lot and find out we've disrupted the slot machines, so they're going to get rid of the loss limit."

The bottom line, company officials suggested, is that the tunnel could increase casino numbers, offsetting the effect of Missouri's \$500 loss-limiting law. A 1992 gaming statute was enacted as a way to protect compulsive gamblers by limiting their losses to \$500 over two hours. [바카라사이트](#)

The only loss-limiting law in the U.S. is actually proposed by the casino industry. But in recent years, Pinnacle and other gambling issues have called for the bill to be repealed, arguing that restrictions on chip purchases are driving gaming enthusiasts to other states.

If all goes according to plan, the tunnel will start near the American Center, a block north of Washington Avenue, move down Interstate 70, and then emerge as a "kind of mezzanine-like area overlooking the casino," says Pinnacle spokesperson Mac Bradley.

"It has direct access to some of the small shops and retail stores on the second floor." As soon as the line is finished, the customer can go outdoors to visit Landing, or create a line of slot machines that is more important to Pinnacle.



According to Bradley, company engineers have investigated the route and are satisfied that they have found a place without sewers and utility lines, although the exact route has yet to be finalized. The area currently has no tunnels, so a new one needs to be built. How deep it is has not yet been determined.

Pinnacle, which owns and operates casinos in Nevada, Mississippi, Louisiana, Indiana and Argentina, expects "pedestrian connections" under the company name to beckon gamblers who don't want to cross one of the least pedestrian-friendly areas of the city straight into the Palace of Pleasure.

Pinnacle President Wade Hendley theorizes, "If it's easy to move from place to place, people definitely will, and we'll be sitting at the center of it all. The connection from that side of the highway to Laclede's Landing -- if we can get people to walk through our facility, we'll all benefit from it."

Originally based in Las Vegas, the game company considered pedestrian bridges, says Rodney Kreme, executive director of the St. Louis Development Company, which gave the project a tentative blessing. "But you would still cross under the highway. They thought it was either appealing or unattractive to people who wanted to come from one side to the other."

It was Daniel R. Lee, Pinnacle's CEO, who came up with the tunnel idea. "It was one of those moments where everyone was like, 'Oh... yeah!'" recalls Bradley. Pinnacle will pay for the entire project, which Cream estimates will cost \$10 million.

Bradley says the tunnel is vital for the benefit of Pinnacle. If the company is going to spend that kind of money, they want it to give gamblers easy, undisturbed access to the casinos. He says, "It was obvious right away, and it's no secret to anyone else in the city. What a barrier Interstate 70 is between the riverside area and the entire city."

Fleeing questions about whether \$10 million could be better spent on improving concrete waste on the ground, Cream says only, "The good thing is, they're paying for it."

The development, which plans to include casinos and Four Seasons hotels, restaurants, retail stores and residential properties when completed in 2007, will consume 11 acres and extend from Highway 70 to the Mississippi River.

Although the architectural drawings are not complete, Bradley says the company envisions a gazebo-style entrance that descends into a clean, well-lit aisles similar to the movement of



people at O'Hare International Airport. It will carry visitors directly inside the complex without any other route.

"Once you get into the western end of the tunnel, you'll be inside, you'll be on the other end before you know it," Bradley says. "The experience has to be an enjoyable experience." Crim emphasizes that once Pinnacle completes its design, it will face general bureaucratic scrutiny, including review by all relevant city departments and environmental impact studies. The Missouri Department of Transportation will also have to sign on to the project, as the tunnel moves down the highway. So far, no one has been blamed by the underground walkway.

If the tunnel is cleared, Bradley says, Pinnacle may have solved a problem that has long plagued riverside advocates.

"The \$64,000 question is, "How can I get people into the area? Once they get to the area, they'll figure out what they want to do, and there's a lot of work to do. But you have to take them there."