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Solar panel roads: The future is getting closer to now

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Craig Coppola, a principal with Lee & Associates Commercial Real Estate Services and a prominent CRE broker, first wrote about the idea of roads and parking lots made of solar panels back in 2014 for an economic and industry blog he pens.

Now Coppola is back and talking again about harnessing solar power via panels paved into the streets, roads and parking lots.

Coppola again writes in his blog about a solar panel road built in France.

A town in Normandy has unveiled a 0.6-mile stretch of road covered in solar panels.

The panels are covered with protective resin and very fine sheets of silicon to protect the panels from vehicles while offering grips to tires, according to a story on Mashable.

French officials are seeing if the technology can power street lights in the town, according to The Guardian.

Arizona — with its ample sunshine, solar farms and companies such as First Solar Inc. (Nasdaq: FSLR) — is one of the top solar states in the U.S.

Arizona State University and a number of other public institutions have been aggressive in outfitting buildings and parking structures with solar panels.

The Salt River Project is proving solar and renewable energy for Apple Inc. (Nasdaq: AAPL) and its data center in Mesa. Intel Corp. (Nasdaq: INTC) has a new huge solar structure in Chandler.

The idea of roads, freeways and parking lots all essentially paved with solar panels that would soak in the sun could be a huge innovation, especially in sun-soaked Arizona.

Coppola said the challenge with solar energy has always been making it commercially viable.

The Lee executive notes that the French experiment is expensive costing \$5.2 million to outfit the 0.6-mile stretch.

But he's optimistic the future is closer.

"In short, the future is here, but there is still some way to go before it is a viable option. How will this road handle heavy trucks, weather, and usage? Will the power generation remain constant? These are some of the questions that will get answered over the next few years," Coppola writes.

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Could roads and parking lots be outfitted with solar panels?

