



Executive Director's Report

Our December Regional Council meeting coincided with a major media announcement in which five regional planning agencies throughout the Intermountain West formally announced the formation of the Western High-Speed Rail Alliance. The Alliance will work to support the creation of a high-speed rail system in the Western United States.

There are many reasons for the Maricopa Association of Governments to join this Alliance. We believe that the development of a national high-speed rail system will provide efficient, cost-effective options for both passenger and freight customers. High speed rail can play a major role in reducing congestion, while in turn increasing interstate highway capacity for goods movement and improving air quality by reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The U.S. Department of Transportation strategic map for high-speed rail does not include a high speed rail link for the MAG Region. The Alliance envisions a Phoenix to Los Angeles corridor via a high-speed rail network as well as a Phoenix to Las Vegas connection, with additional regional hubs in Salt Lake City, Denver and Reno.

While many question whether the West has the density to warrant high speed rail investment, census data show that the urbanized area of many Western cities, including Las Vegas, Denver, Salt Lake City and Phoenix, have greater densities than many of the cities that were originally selected as potential corridors—including Detroit, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Minneapolis.

The Intermountain West needs to be treated fairly. Investing in a rail system that could transport passengers from Phoenix to Los Angeles in less than three hours would be an important economic investment for our region.

As Congress prepares for the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act, the Alliance is prepared to request \$50 million to study 2,000 to 2,500 miles of potential corridors over the next five years and to lay the groundwork for additional development of a high-speed rail system.

The Alliance believes funding for these studies is essential for the development of a national high-speed rail plan. MAG is looking forward to working with the other Intermountain West planning agencies and our Congressional representatives to ensure that these studies are adequately funded.

For more information, please contact Dennis Smith, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.



Regional Council Meeting Report for Wednesday, December 9, 2009

Action Items

Policy Options Approved for Local ARRA Funds

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 directs transportation infrastructure funds to highway and transit agencies in states and regional planning organizations. With many of the projects originally prioritized by the Regional Council for this funding coming in under programmed amounts, the Regional Council approved several policy options for utilizing the savings that will be available for additional projects. The Regional Council also discussed options for handling the money that becomes available for redistribution from projects that are not able to meet regional or federal deadlines for projects to be “obligated” (receive approval from the Federal Highway Administration).

The Regional Council approved that any unobligated ARRA Local funds are to be programmed at the local discretion first, and may remain ARRA funds or may be exchanged with the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) for Surface Transportation Program (STP) funds. ADOT would then use the ARRA funds on highway projects in the MAG region and ADOT would transfer an equivalent amount of ADOT STP funds that can be used by MAG members on local federally-funded projects. If applicable, the local agency may use project cost savings from its own original ARRA allocation to lower the local cost share on projects.

In presenting the option to the Regional Council, staff noted that a key advantage to exchanging funds is that it allows a flexible, local solution that would simplify ARRA savings. In addition, the deadline for obligating STP funds is September 2010 and would provide additional time for projects to obligate. Staff reported that a downside is that STP funding requires a 5.7 percent match from the local jurisdiction, meaning that a \$500,000 project would require the jurisdiction to fund \$28,500 of the project.

For more information, please contact Eileen Yazzie, Transportation Program Manager (602) 254-6300.

Revision of Highway Projects to be Funded With ARRA

In September, the MAG Regional Council approved reprioritizing the ARRA Highway project list based on project readiness. Since that time, highway projects have continued to move forward. There have been substantial differences in the amount of ARRA Highway funds programmed and the actual bid/contract award amount. The current project cost savings total \$2.36 million. With these savings projected to continue, the Regional Council voted to add the State Route (SR) 143 project to the ARRA Highway project list to be funded based on the ability to obligate. The SR-143 project is a \$35 million traffic interchange project and any

current and future project savings could be applied toward the implementation of this project.

For more information, please contact Eileen Yazzie, Transportation Program Manager (602) 254-6300.

Additional Transit Projects to be Funded With ARRA

In addition to local and highway projects, ARRA allocated \$66.4 million to transit projects in the MAG region. The law was subsequently amended to allow 10 percent of ARRA transit funds to be allocated for transit operations and 10 percent for ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) operations. Originally, all ARRA funds programmed for transit in our region were allocated to capital projects, but with these projects also coming in under programmed amounts, the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) Board met and recommended the project savings be allocated toward operations. To accomplish this, the RPTA recommended approving priority guidelines, and the methodology by which operating and preventive maintenance funds are allocated to bus, rail, and ADA projects. This change would result in 11 projects that would be added to the MAG 2008-2012 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), including six operating assistance (\$1.75 million) and five ADA complimentary (\$1.75 million) paratransit projects.

The Regional Council voted to approve that the 11 projects be funded through the ARRA transit funds.

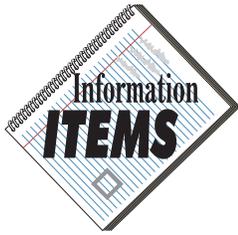
For more information, please contact Eileen Yazzie, Transportation Program Manager (602) 254-6300.

Regional Council Submits Names for TPC Vacancy

With the passage of Proposition 400 on November 2, 2004, the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives were authorized to each appoint three business members to the Transportation Policy Committee. Business Representative Eneas Kane, Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for DMB properties, recently notified the Speaker and MAG that he would be resigning from the TPC effective December 31, 2009, opening a vacancy in a term originally scheduled to end on December 31, 2012.

While Proposition 400 requires the legislative leadership to appoint the business members, the law also provides for the Chair of MAG to submit names for consideration. The Regional Council voted to submit four names to the Legislature: Charles Huellmantel, Principal of Huellmantel & Affiliates, LLC; Garrett Newland, Vice President of Development for Westcor; Karrin Kunasek Taylor, Executive Vice President, Chief Entitlements Officer for DMB; and David Veillette, President and Chief Executive Officer for the Cancer Treatment Centers of America at the Western Regional Medical Center.

For more information, contact Dennis Smith, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.



Information Items

Commuter Rail Studies Update

In 2004, Maricopa County voters approved Proposition 400, which included a provision to fund transportation planning studies. A portion of the funds was allocated to conduct a Commuter Rail Strategic Planning Study to define requirements and steps needed to plan for and implement commuter rail service in the MAG region. Findings from the plan indicated the need for three additional planning studies: a Systems Study, Grand Avenue Corridor Study and Yuma West Corridor Study. The Regional Council was provided an update on the status of the studies.

The first study, the Systems Study, is exploring the five potential Commuter Rail corridors identified in the 2007 Commuter Rail Strategic Plan to gauge the potential for each of the corridors. The study is examining factors such as existing freight operations and potential opportunities for operating commuter rail in existing rights of way. The study also seeks to evaluate ridership potential and capital and operating costs.

While the Systems Study is taking a “macro” view of commuter rail in the region, the Grand Avenue Commuter Rail Corridor Plan is taking a focused approach to the implementation of commuter rail between Wickenburg and downtown Phoenix, along the existing Burlington Northern Santa Fe right of way. The study will include an inventory of existing rail infrastructure as well as necessary improvements to implement commuter rail in the region.

The third study, the Yuma West Commuter Rail Corridor Plan, is looking specifically at the possible implementation of commuter rail along the existing Union Pacific Railway between downtown Phoenix and Arlington, west of Buckeye. Similar to the Grand Avenue study, it will review existing and future conditions and seek to develop a conceptual commuter rail operating plan. A commuter rail stakeholders group will meet in early 2010 to review the project team’s final recommendations, followed by a formal committee review process at MAG.

For more information, please contact Kevin Wallace, MAG Transit Planning Project Manager, (602) 254-6300

The Arizona We Want

The Arizona We Want is the result of a five-year effort to capture the ideas of Arizona leaders and the citizens they represent. The first step was taken in 2005 when the Center for the Future of Arizona published the results of a two-year study that reviewed more than 50 major policy reports. The second phase, launched in 2008, set out to find the voice of Arizona citizens through the Gallup Arizona Poll. More than a snapshot in time, the poll offers a realistic and contemporary picture

of what citizens think about life in Arizona communities and what they want for the future. The result is a new framework for action that can be used by leaders in all sectors—an opportunity map, a set of underlying issues that must be resolved, and a citizens' agenda for *The Arizona We Want*. The Regional Council received an update on the findings of the study.

The poll found that Arizonans are surprisingly attached to their communities, agree on more than they disagree, and that the state's natural beauty and open spaces are seen as our greatest asset. Respondents indicated a desire for greater leadership. The identified "citizen's agenda" included a desire to create quality jobs for all Arizonans and to prepare Arizonans of all ages for the 21st century workforce. Additional desires were for Arizona to become "the place to be" for talented young people and protection of Arizona's natural environment, water supplies and open spaces. More results of the study can be found at www.TheArizonaWeWant.org.
For more information, please contact Dennis Smith, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.

Next Regional Council Meeting

The next meeting of the MAG Regional Council is scheduled for Wednesday, January 27, 2010, at 5:00 p.m. in the Saguaro Room, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Phoenix. Agenda items are pending.

For more information, please contact Dennis Smith, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.