



## Executive Director's Report

The first Regional Council meeting of the new year brought news that the U.S. House of Representatives has passed a new "Jobs for Main Street" Bill that could provide a second round of economic stimulus funding to the region. Although the initial bill includes some significant deadline challenges, MAG has identified two design-build projects that we believe could meet the tight deadlines and potentially free up money that can be applied to other Regional Transportation Plan projects.

In December, the House passed House Resolution (HR) 2847, which provides additional infrastructure investments to stimulate the economy. The Senate is expected to take up the bill soon and could make substantial changes before the bill is passed by Congress. However, as passed by the House, an additional \$27.5 billion in funding for highways and \$8.4 billion for public transit would be provided, using the same allocation and process that were part of the first stimulus package. One significant difference is a dramatically shorter time frame to spend the funds.

The new bill requires that half of the highway and transit funds need to be under contract within 90 days of when the funds become available. "Under contract" would mean the project has been advertised for bid, the bids have been received and evaluated, the bid award made, and the contract signed. Under the first stimulus package, 50 percent of the funds had only to be obligated (programmed and approved by the Federal Highway Administration), and the time frame was 180 days.

We are fortunate that MAG and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) have been working on two large HOV projects (see summary below) for which right-of-way is already acquired that could meet this short time frame. However, it is important to note that this time constraint limits the types of projects that can be considered for the funding.

A second concern is an act of Congress that took effect in September 2009, whereby unobligated federal highway funds were subject to a rescission. Arizona lost nearly \$171 million of federal apportionments as a result of this rescission. Exactly what that means to the projects in our Regional Transportation Plan is unknown, but our current understanding is that the federal fiscal year 2009 closeout process zeroed out (or nearly zeroed out) virtually every category of federal funding, including Surface Transportation Program funds. This means that funding that was intended to be carried over to this year for projects may not be available.

It is perplexing that while Congress is passing economic stimulus legislation on one hand, on the other hand it is taking away funding through rescissions. As we

continue to work through these conflicting congressional actions, we will look to the support and understanding of our stakeholders, members, and partners.

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

## **Regional Council Meeting Report for Wednesday, January 27, 2010**

### **Action Items**



#### **Projects Approved for Potential Economic Stimulus Funding**

As noted above, the U.S. House of Representatives has passed a new “Jobs for Main Street” Bill that could provide economic stimulus funding to the region similar to that provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). As currently drafted, MAG would likely receive approximately the same amount of funding under the Jobs Bill as it did under ARRA – \$130 million for highway projects, \$105 million for local or suballocated projects, and about \$65 million for transit.

In anticipation of proposed requirements that projects would need to be under contract within 90 days of when the funds become available, the Regional Council approved an amendment to add two HOV projects to the current Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) and Regional Transportation Plan. Both projects are expected to be able to meet the conditions and deadlines imposed by the proposed jobs bill. The projects include a design-build project on the Santan Freeway from I-10 to approximately Gilbert Road, including the ramp connections at I-10 and Loop 101 (\$146 million), and a design build project for Loop 101 to complete the HOV lanes and other improvements from Tatum Boulevard to the junction with I-10 (\$139.5 million). The approval of the amendment is subject to air quality conformity analysis and contingent on funding provided from the jobs bill.

#### **Transit Planning and Programming Roles and Responsibilities**

The Regional Council has deferred until its next meeting approval of recommendations for the consolidation and clarification of transit planning and programming roles and responsibilities, pending completion and approval of a memorandum of understanding between MAG, the Regional Planning Transportation Authority (RPTA) and Valley Metro Rail (METRO). The purpose of the recommendations is to provide better integration of all modes of travel in the Regional Transportation Plan; continue development of a transit program that reflects regional priorities identified in the Plan; ensure that MAG is meeting its responsibilities to develop an integrated long range transportation plan, develop and administer the Transportation Improvement Program and provide administrative oversight of the utilization of Proposition 400 funds; and to clarify

roles and responsibilities of transit planning agencies to reduce duplication and ensure a more efficient and integrated planning process.

Under the recommendations, MAG would be responsible for transit system planning activities and would coordinate regional sustainability issues and transit oriented development issues. For alternatives analysis projects, recommendations for alignment, technology and budget would be reviewed and approved through the MAG process.

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



## **Information Items**

### **Update on State BLM Efforts**

The Regional Council was provided an update on current efforts by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Arizona. The BLM is a federal organization that is responsible for serving the public interest on 12.2 million acres of land in Arizona by working collaboratively on natural resource programs and issues that are woven into the fabric of Arizona's public lands. The state director reported that due to the complexity and long-term relevance of American life, the issues facing BLM are important and often challenging. The Bureau has identified four landscape sustainability issues and is currently examining trends in these areas, including water, ecology, climate, and working landscapes. The BLM also is working to identify and protect heritage resources in three categories, including the national landscape conservation system, tribal relations, and heritage properties. The BLM seeks to engage in a public dialogue to discuss questions, proposals and issues affecting sustainable landscapes and sustainable communities, and to seek open public processes that search for the solutions.

**For more information, contact Jim Kenna, Ariz. State Director, Bureau of Land Management, (602) 417-9500.**

### **Pinal County Comprehensive Plan**

The Regional Council was provided an overview of the Pinal County Comprehensive Plan. In November, the Pinal County Board of Supervisors approved the Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of the plan was to guide area development as the county grows toward a projected population of 6.1 million people. The plan is the result of public outreach, meetings, committee efforts, and consultations with private and public firms. The plan focuses on centralized development by creating economic centers across the county linked by multiple modes of transportation, including rail and freeway systems, as well as a regional airport. The Pinal County Comprehensive Plan can be accessed on the county's Web site at [www.pinalcountyaz.gov](http://www.pinalcountyaz.gov).

**For more information, please contact Jerry Stabley, Pinal County Planning Director, (520) 866-6465.**

### **Next Regional Council Meeting**

The next meeting of the MAG Regional Council is scheduled for Wednesday, February 24, 2010, at 5:00 p.m. in the Saguaro Room, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Phoenix. Agenda items are expected to include an update on proposed federal economic stimulus legislation, financial planning and fiscal constraint requirements for federal transportation funding and the status of federal funds rescission at the Arizona Department of Transportation; implementation status of committed measures in the MAG 2007 Five Percent Plan for PM-10; and an update on the development of the FY 2011 MAG Unified Planning Work Program and Annual Budget. Additional agenda items are pending.

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