



Executive Director's Report

At our February meeting, MAG staff reported on the recent vote by the Gila River Indian Community, which unofficially appears to favor a “no-build” option for construction of the South Mountain Loop 202 Freeway. This vote represents a significant milestone in the process and allows us to focus our efforts now exclusively on the Pecos Road alignment. MAG is extremely grateful to the Gila River Indian Community for allowing its members to vote on whether to consider an on-Community alignment of the South Mountain Freeway. The Community position will be considered as part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The Community's “no-build” vote means that study of the Pecos Road alignment continues as the only alignment alternative between South Mountain and Interstate 10 at the Pecos Stack interchange. The preliminary preferred alternative for the western north-south leg of the freeway would follow a route in the vicinity of 59th and 61st Avenues in the Laveen and Estrella villages of Phoenix. As a requirement of federal environmental studies, a no-build option is also studied as an alternative. However, MAG studies continue to demonstrate a strong purpose and need for the facility, while a no-build alternative would result in considerably higher levels of traffic congestion on the region's other freeways and on arterial routes, such as Baseline Road and Southern Avenue in the city of Phoenix.

Staff reported that the Draft EIS will be ready for public review later this year. A 90-day review period will be provided by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) and Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to the public for review and comment. Within that 90-day review period, a public hearing will be conducted by both agencies. Following this period, ADOT and FHWA will review and summarize all public comments to determine if additional clarity or study is needed to develop the Final EIS. The Final EIS is anticipated at the end of 2012, where the public will have a 60-day period to provide final review and comment on the corridor study process. Following the Final EIS, the FHWA will announce a Record of Decision on the project, anticipated in the spring of 2013, which will then allow ADOT to begin design, right-of-way acquisition, and construction.

While we recognize that no-build is a study option, the MAG Regional Council has long held that the South Mountain Freeway is necessary for high-quality regional mobility. It serves as an important link between the southeast and southwest areas of the Valley and as an alternative route to Interstate 10. It would reduce congestion

on surface streets such as Baseline Road and Southern Avenue. It is also an important piece of the overall regional system, completing the Loop 202 system. Consider:

- It is estimated that up to 170,000 vehicles per day will use the South Mountain Freeway each day in 2035, which is comparable to current use on the Loop 101 in Scottsdale and Loop 202 in Mesa today. More than 90 percent of this traffic will be local in origin, just like the existing Loop system.
- Without the proposed freeway, this traffic would have to depend upon other over-burdened roadways, such as I-10 and Baseline Road, to make connections between the East Valley and West Valley.
- The purpose of the proposed freeway is to provide improved mobility for the current and future residents of the region.
- The freeway would serve as an alternative in the event of emergency closures of other regional freeways.
- The proposed freeway may serve other purposes as well, including providing regional links to the regional transportation system, as outlined in the Regional Transportation Plan; serving regional mobility needs; and meeting objectives adopted in regional and local long-range plans.

While February's meeting involved an update on the Gila River vote, MAG anticipates further discussion regarding the facility. Construction for the South Mountain Freeway is currently scheduled to begin in the 2014-2015 timeframe, with the \$1.9 billion construction cost already set aside in the regional freeway and highway program budget.

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

Regional Council Meeting Report for Wednesday, February 22, 2012

Action Items

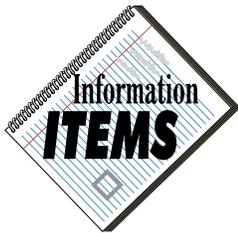
Council Approves Closeout Strategy

The MAG Regional Council approved a scenario for "closing out" the current federal fiscal year. Federal guidelines require that planning agencies determine what will happen to funding that is made available when projects that were originally included in the budget are delayed or not constructed. The MAG Transportation Review Committee (TRC) met and discussed scenarios to close out the federal fiscal year (FFY) 2012 federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality funds. The TRC recommended approval of a scenario to fund projects at a 50 percent increase of the federal share, up to 100 percent of project costs, with an additional \$293,000 of federal funds going to a Chandler intersection-improvement project that includes bicycle lanes. The remaining balance is flexed to transit with projects and priorities



developed at a later time. The MAG Management Committee also recommended approval of the approach.

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



Information Items

Update on the MAG Five Percent Plan for PM-10

The Regional Council received an update on the Draft MAG 2012 Five Percent Plan for PM-10. Staff reported that the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) has now submitted information regarding a commitment to assess the effectiveness of a new control measure known as the Dust Action General Permit. The ADEQ and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are having additional discussions regarding the Agricultural Best Management Practices Program. The EPA is informally reviewing the technical aspects of the plan. Once these items are addressed, the draft plan document will be completed.

Staff reported that in addition to the submission of the draft plan, the region needs to demonstrate three years of clean data as measured by dust monitors in the region, in order for EPA to determine that the standard has been met. Staff noted that it is critical for the MAG member agencies to maintain their aggressive efforts to prevent exceedances at the monitors and throughout the region. To date in 2012, there have been two exceptional event exceedances of the PM-10 (dust) standard. ADEQ is continuing to prepare documentation for the 21 days of exceptional events in 2011. One issue has been the significant amount of staff work involved in documenting these events. Staff exhibited a two-inch thick document, consisting of more than 200 pages, that was prepared for just one group of exceptional events (July 2-8), noting that 12 more packets will be needed for the remaining events.

The Regional Council expressed concern over recent newspaper articles regarding the region's air quality. Members suggested that MAG produce a video to help communicate to residents that the region's air quality has significantly improved over the past 15 years, despite continued growth.

For more information, please contact Lindy Bauer, MAG Environmental Director, (602) 254-6300.

Greater Phoenix Rising Website

The Regional Council was provided a demonstration of a new economic development oriented website hosted jointly by MAG and the Greater Phoenix Economic Council. The website, www.GreaterPhoenixRising.com, was initially launched in November as a beta site. Since that time, staff has completed the Lifestyles, Key Assets and Special Reports sections that were under construction. Summary videos for the landing pages for the Business and Economy section and Transportation section have also been completed.

Staff highlighted data contained in the new sections. In the Lifestyles section, for example, a subsection on Safety includes several maps outlining the low occurrence of national disasters in our region, such as tornados or earthquakes. Under “Outdoor Activities,” there are maps highlighting Arizona attractions, including a map showing the drive times to those attractions. Other subsections include Climate, Culture and Entertainment, and Cost of Living.

In the Key Assets section, there are a number of charts and graphs for the Education subsection, such as the number of universities and community colleges, degrees awarded, and even a listing of child care centers. There are also subsections for Health Care, Utilities, Military Bases, and International Resources. Under the Special Reports section, there is a section on Technology that includes the high tech employers in the region and their number of employees. Other Special Reports subsections include a “California Comparison” section and “International.”

Staff discussed the importance of outreach for the site, and encouraged member agencies and other business representatives to provide a link to the GreaterPhoenixRising.com site on their website for added visibility.

For more information, please contact Denise McClafferty, MAG Management Analyst, (602) 254-6300.

Arizona Centennial Celebration

Arizona state statutes provide for a celebration of the Arizona Centennial in 2012. The legislation includes projects that will ensure a lasting legacy to celebrate the centennial. The Arizona Historical Advisory Commission has been working to restore the historic Arizona State Capitol building into a working capitol. The building currently houses a museum. Former Phoenix Mayor John Driggs, who is a member of the Arizona Historical Advisory Commission, provided an update on the efforts and encouraged MAG member agencies to help fund the restoration project.

For more information, 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, March 28, 2012, at the new start time of 11:30 a.m. at the MAG offices, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Phoenix, second floor, Saguaro Room. Agenda items are expected to include an update on the Metropolitan Business Plan and an update on the development of the fiscal year 2013 MAG Unified Planning Work Program and Annual Budget. Additional agenda items are pending.