



## Executive Director's Report

"To get a gift, give one and give it early."

These words of advice from former Maricopa County Supervisor Tom Freestone came to mind after the historic unanimous vote of the Regional Council to approve the \$17.5 billion Regional Transportation Plan for an air quality conformity analysis.

You may wonder what this advice has to do with the unanimous vote of the Regional Council. Supervisor Freestone said these words to me as his secret for accomplishing so much in his career. He noted that when he was the first to give, people wanted to work with him and more was accomplished.

In April 2002, following a yearlong governance discussion, the Regional Council understood that a significant change was needed to be successful in extending the one-half cent sales tax for transportation. The decision of the Regional Council was to give something that local governments held very dearly – the task of developing the Regional Transportation Plan – to a group representing the broader community.

The Regional Council formed the Transportation Policy Committee with six regional business representatives voting on the Committee. The Regional Council went further, and gave significant responsibility to the Committee for recommending Plan changes and amendments. This was unheard of at MAG, giving away major control of the development of the Plan to a group that was not all local governments.

So what did our region get in return for giving away this major control? A great deal!

- Support of the business coalition in passing HB 2292, which recognized federal planning requirements, further refined the consultation process, put existing freeway safeguards in place for streets and transit, and set the stage for the 2004 one-half cent sales tax election.

- Success in working through the thorny issue of transit operations with the business community and having a united business and local government position for funding transit operations.
- Acknowledgment by the business community that light rail has been supported by earlier local votes and is needed in heavily congested areas where building freeways is not a viable option.
- Sponsorship by the business community of an educational trip involving legislators to Dallas, one of our competitor regions, to see the multimodal transportation system investments that are embraced by the Dallas business community.
- Having business representatives serve a critical balancing role in the final stages of the Plan.

These are just a few of the benefits that this region received. Both business and local government came away with a greater sense of what can be accomplished by working together for the benefit of the region.

In the end, the gift given by the Regional Council resulted in the ultimate gift to the residents of the region – a great transportation plan. And we received a successful new model for conducting business for solving other regional issues. **For more information, please contact Dennis Smith, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.**



## **Regional Council Meeting Report for September 24, 2003**

### **Regional Transportation Plan Approved**

The Maricopa Association of Governments Regional Council unanimously approved a nearly \$16 billion transportation plan, pending air quality testing. The Plan was recommended to the Regional Council by the 22-member Transportation Policy Committee (TPC), which also unanimously approved the Plan at its meeting September 17th.

The vote culminates the most comprehensive transportation planning effort in the Valley in the past 40 years. The Plan is especially significant because it will serve as the foundation for a half-cent sales tax extension expected to go before voters May 18, 2004.

The plan contains \$15.8 billion dollars in transportation projects that span a

variety of transportation modes, including new and improved freeways with better access and more capacity, 27.5 miles in new light rail extensions, a tripling of bus service with added routes and less waiting, and improved streets and intersections to help relieve congestion.

Following are just a few of the major plan elements, complete with a percentage breakdown of funding for each mode.

*Freeways/Highways = 57% of total regional funding.*

- Additional lanes on Loop 101, Loop 202, I-10, I-17, SR 51, and US 60.
- New freeways, including Loop 303, an I-10 Reliever, Williams Gateway Parkway and the South Mountain Loop.
- New and improved traffic interchanges.
- New carpool lanes.
- Grand Avenue improvements.
- Maintenance (litter control and landscaping).
- Rubberized asphalt and noise mitigation for existing freeways.

*Transit = 32% of total regional funding. (17% bus, 15% rail)*

- 27.5 miles of new light rail expansion (beyond the 30 miles already funded).
- A regional bus plan known as a “supergrid.” The supergrid concept includes new or enhanced service on 30 routes, plus the creation of 10 new routes.
- Improvements to express/bus rapid transit service, including enhancements to 16 existing routes and the creation of 14 new routes.
- A doubling of paratransit services for persons with disabilities.
- 32 new passenger facilities (including 20 park-and-ride lots).
- 2,100 new buses and 1,000 new Dial-a-Ride vehicles for replacements and expansion.
- Commuter rail planning.

*Street Improvements = 9% of total regional funds.*

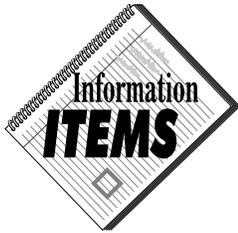
- Northern Parkway.
- Rio Salado Parkway.
- Sonoran Parkway.
- Major street and intersection improvements across the Valley.
- Intelligent Transportation Systems such as “smart signals” that sense traffic conditions.

*Other Programs = 2% of total regional funds.*

- Safety planning.
- Regional planning programs.

- Bicycle projects.
- Pedestrian facilities.
- Programs to reduce travel and improve air quality.
- Rideshare programs.

**For more information, please contact Eric Anderson, MAG Transportation Director, (602) 254-6300.**



## **Information Items**

### **Public Meetings Draw Hundreds**

About 500 Valley residents participated in six public meetings/hearings held across the region to get input into the draft Regional Transportation Plan. The events were held in six regional subareas, and included Central, Southwest, Northwest, Surprise/Sun City, Southeast and Northeast meetings. In addition to the public meetings, six business meetings were also held to provide opportunities for input from the business community.

The meetings included an open house with informational displays, a computer presentation on what is in the Plan, and an informal question-and-answer period. A court reporter was also available at each location to take formal comment on the Plan.

In addition to the six meetings, members of the public provided comments on the Plan via the MAG Web site, through the US mail, via telephone, and at a number of special events hosted by MAG.

Participants at the meetings and events were asked to fill out a six-question survey. Results from the surveys found that about 97 percent of respondents agreed that there is a significant transportation problem in Maricopa County that needs to be addressed. About 78 percent of them were aware that the half-cent sales tax will expire in 2005. About 82 percent of respondents agreed with the level of bus improvements in the Plan, about 80 percent with the level of freeway improvements, and 69 percent with the level of light rail improvements. The highest number of respondents, 85 percent, agreed with the level of investments allocated in the Plan to streets.

Public comments and staff responses to comments can be found in the Final Draft Stage of the Regional Transportation Plan Input Opportunity Report, available for review at the MAG library, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Suite 300, Phoenix.

**For more information, please contact Kelly Taft, MAG Communications Manager, (602) 254-6300.**

### **Poll Finds Strong Support for Tax Extension**

A telephone poll of 600 registered voters indicates that 75 percent of Maricopa County voters would support the extension of the current half-cent sales tax for transportation, if the election were held today.

The poll was conducted by Behavior Research Center in August. The support was strong within all geographic areas of the Valley. The poll also found that awareness of the expiration of the half-cent sales tax for transportation has risen since a similar poll was conducted in December, from 27 percent to 31 percent. Voters were also asked to rate their overall transportation spending priorities. Freeway, major street improvements and bus service were the highest-rated priorities, with six to seven in ten giving each a high priority. Light rail and Dial-a-Ride services received high priority ratings from 45 percent and 39 percent, respectively, while another fifth to a third rated each as “moderate” priorities. Voters also showed support for regional improvements, with 89 percent reporting that they favor a transportation system that improves how people get around the entire Valley, and only nine percent favoring one that improves how people get around their area of the Valley.

When asked the likelihood of utilizing various transportation modes in the future, 94 percent of respondents indicated they or a member of their family would use freeways, 55 percent indicated they would use light rail, 49 percent bus service, and 25 percent Dial-a-Ride.

Even when presented with arguments both for and against individual transportation modes, support for the tax extension remained high. The primary reasons voters gave for supporting the sales tax extension were that the overall transportation system in the Valley needs to be improved or kept current, improvements are needed to keep up with Valley growth, there is a need for more or updated freeways, and there is a need to reduce traffic congestion. **For more information, please contact Kelly Taft, MAG Communications Manager, (602) 254-6300.**

### **Homeland Security Urban Area Assessment**

The Regional Council was provided an update regarding the FY 2003 Urban Areas Security Initiative Grant Program. The State, Maricopa County, and the cities of Phoenix, Glendale and Mesa comprise the Urban Area Working Group, which is coordinating the grant information for the region. MAG has been asked to help facilitate the process as a regional point of contact. To date, information has been collected from jurisdictions regarding threat and risk assessments,

and the information has been submitted to Maricopa County and the State Office of Homeland Security. The strategy portion of the grant is being developed by the Urban Area Working Group, and will be brought to the Management Committee and Regional Council for comment.

**For more information, please contact Tom Remes, MAG Senior Policy Planner, (602) 254-6300.**

### **Foundations Unite to Create Regional Arts and Culture Task Force**

Four private foundations have joined together to form a task force to help advance arts and culture regionally, calling the move an important component of new technology-based economic development efforts underway throughout the Valley. The 30-member task force will conduct a comparative analysis of other technology-based regional economies, to outline what the Phoenix area must do to compete with other regions on quality-of-life measures.

The Flinn Foundation, the Virginia G. Piper Charitable Trust, the J.W. Kieckhefer Foundation, and the Margaret T. Morris Foundation have combined resources to fund the work of the task force and the regional analysis. The initiative is a new step in a two-year effort by the foundations to strengthen the arts and culture infrastructure in the region.

**For more information, please contact Suzanne Pfister, B.J. Communications, at (602) 277-9530, extension 232.**

### **Upcoming Events**



#### **Next Regional Council Meeting**

The next Regional Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 22, 2003 at 5:00 p.m. at the MAG offices, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Suite 200, Phoenix. Agenda items are expected to include a Request for Qualifications for air quality technical assistance, approval of the Special FY 2004-2007 Draft Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) for an air quality conformity analysis, an update on Urban Area Homeland Security Strategy, approval of the Memorandum of Understanding on a Regional Concept of Transportation Operations for consideration by the MAG member agencies, update on compiling information on Regionally Significant Projects, and approval of the July 1, 2003 Municipality Population Updates. Additional agenda items are pending.

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