



## Executive Director's Report

At our September 30th Regional Council Meeting, the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) presented an update on "Building a Quality Arizona," an effort to envision the long-range (2050) transportation future through a series of regional framework studies (*see information items, page 4*).

This "recommended framework" could have significant influence on policy decisions in the future. At MAG, we are developing a series of framework studies and an update to our Regional Transportation Plan to be incorporated into the ADOT statewide vision.

The first MAG framework study, the Hassayampa Framework Study, became the model for similar regional studies across the state. Additional MAG studies have included the Interstates 8 and 10 Hidden Valley Roadway Framework Study, the Transit Framework Study, and the upcoming Central Phoenix Framework Study. During the Hidden Valley study, we worked closely with Pinal County to extend framework planning into southwestern Maricopa County and western Pinal County.

The framework studies are a "bottoms up" process with the goal of producing a statewide vision that is supported throughout the state. These framework studies have included intensive outreach and collaboration with policymakers, stakeholders, interest groups, and the public.

Many have asked, where will the funding come from for the projects identified in the framework studies? It is interesting to note that earlier planning in the 1960s in Maricopa County went unfunded for more than 20 years and became the foundation of the freeway system that we have today. Another important element of framework planning is the opportunity to conduct an environmental scan that can serve as the foundation in protecting Arizona's vital open space for future generations.

Arizona is a great state that we are confident will continue to prosper. The framework process will give us direction for making the best investment decisions possible for the transportation infrastructure that will serve our future residents. **For more information, please contact Dennis Smith, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.**



## **Regional Council Report for Wednesday, September 30, 2009**

### **Action Items**

#### **ARRA Highway Projects Reprioritized**

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) directs transportation infrastructure funds to both highways and transit agencies in states and metropolitan planning organizations. There are three areas in which our region is eligible for stimulus funding: Highway, Transit, and Sub-Allocated (local) projects. In February 2009, the MAG Regional Council prioritized five highway projects, including a backup list of additional prioritized projects, to be programmed with the \$129 million in ARRA funding for state highways. Since that time, many construction bids have come in lower than anticipated, resulting in \$14.7 million in savings that can be applied toward the additional projects on the list. However, not all of the prioritized projects in the remaining list are at the same stage of readiness. Since project readiness is vital to meeting the established federal deadline, the Regional Council voted to reprioritize the ARRA Highway project list that was approved in February based on the ability to obligate (receive all necessary federal approvals).

MAG committees are still considering policies regarding whether unprogrammed local ARRA funds should be reprogrammed to another project or remain allocated to the local jurisdiction, based on project eligibility and readiness. The Regional Council will discuss those policies in October.

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

#### **Acceptance of the Hidden Valley Transportation Framework Study**

The Regional Council voted to accept the findings and implementation strategies contained in the Interstates 8 and 10 Hidden Valley Transportation Framework Study. The study includes a framework of future transportation options in areas surrounding Interstate 8 and Interstate 10 in the far West Valley.

The study is the second framework effort in the region following acceptance of the Interstate 10 Hassayampa Framework Study in 2008. The framework studies seek to establish a network of transportation facilities to meet the buildout travel demand, which would need to accommodate a projected population of 2.5 million people in the area. The Hidden Valley study includes the area bounded by the Gila River on the north, State Route 87 and Pinal County on the east, the Tohono O'Odham Indian Community and Barry Goldwater Range on the south, and 459th Avenue on the west. The study was a jointly funded project by MAG, ADOT, Maricopa County Department of Transportation, Pinal County Public Works, the cities of Goodyear and Maricopa, and the town of Buckeye.

The recommendations accepted by the Regional Council include an illustrative network of more than 400 miles of freeways, Arizona Parkways and high capacity transit corridors. The Regional Council action included accepting the findings and implementation strategies as described in the study for inclusion as long-range unfunded illustrative corridors in the Regional Transportation Plan; recommending that the affected jurisdictions within the Hidden Valley study area incorporate the study's recommendations into future updates of their general plans; and coordinating the acceptance with the tribal councils of the Gila River and Ak Chin Native American Indian Communities.

**For more information, please contact Bob Hazlett, MAG Senior Engineer, at (602) 254-6300.**

### **Mesa Rail Alignment Approved**

The Regional Council approved a locally-preferred alternative for a light rail alignment in the central Mesa corridor. In June, the METRO Board of Directors approved the locally preferred alternative, resulting from the alternatives analysis on the technology and alignment to extend high capacity transit improvements in the corridor. The preferred alignment includes a light rail transit extension on Main Street east to an interim end-of-the-line east of Mesa Drive as Phase I. In addition, METRO also approved forwarding Phase II recommendations to MAG for future funding consideration, which include a future extension of the light rail transit corridor on Main Street to approximately Gilbert Road, as well as improvements to service frequency on the Main Street LINK Bus Rapid Transit to match light rail service. The Mesa City Council approved these recommendations in May. The Regional Council approved the locally preferred alternative identified in Phase I, as well as the consideration of the Phase II recommendations for future funding consideration as an "illustrative" project.

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

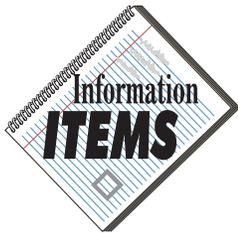
### **Regional Council Approves Transit Programming Policies**

The Regional Council voted to approve changes regarding transit programming and planning roles, following an examination by the Executive Committee of the current roles performed by MAG, the Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) and Valley Metro Rail (METRO). The examination was prompted by three factors, including the need for a more integrated transit planning process, notice by the Federal Transit Administration for MAG to more fully assume the transit programming role, and the need for a more efficient and integrated planning and programming process.

After reviewing four options that were developed to address better integration of transit planning and programming, the Executive Committee recommended to the Regional Council Option I, that programming be consolidated at MAG.

The Regional Council approved Option I, and also approved forming a MAG transit committee; addressing potential budget issues regarding the RPTA and METRO in the development of the FY 2011 MAG Unified Planning Work Program and Annual Budget; and directing MAG staff to report back to the Executive Committee within 90 days with a plan on progress regarding the remaining options, including a budget analysis of the options.

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



## **Information Items**

### **Building a Quality Arizona Update**

The Building a Quality Arizona process was initiated in 2006 by the Arizona COG/MPO (Councils of Governments and Metropolitan Planning Organizations) Association. The process began with the Interstate 10 Hassayampa Framework Study conducted by MAG in the Maricopa region, which became a model for similar regional studies across the state. Additional studies were then conducted by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) to envision the long-range (2050) transportation future and what is necessary to get there. The process has included intensive outreach and collaboration with policymakers, stakeholders, interest groups, and the public.

The goal for the framework studies is to develop a statewide long-range transportation plan that provides residents and the traveling public with mobility choices. It is anticipated that other ongoing study efforts will also be incorporated into the Statewide Recommended Framework Program. These include framework studies being conducted by MAG, including the Interstate 10 Hassayampa Framework Study; the Interstates 8 and 10 Hidden Valley Roadway Framework Study; Transit Framework Study; and the upcoming Central Phoenix Framework Study (scheduled to begin in 2010). Additional efforts include the Statewide Rail Framework Study and current Regional Transportation Plan updates being conducted by MAG and the Pima Association of Governments (PAG), along with a high capacity transit study being conducted by PAG.

**For more information, please contact Bob Hazlett, MAG Senior Engineer, (602) 254-6300.**

### **Next Regional Council Meeting**

The next meeting of the MAG Regional Council is scheduled for Wednesday, October 28, 2009, at 5:00 p.m. in the Saguaro Room, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Phoenix. Agenda items are expected to include a tentative scenario for bridging a \$6.6 billion funding gap; policy options on unused local funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; and annual report on the status of the implementation of Proposition 400. Additional agenda items are pending.

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