



Interim Executive Director's Report

Against the backdrop of towering cacti and the stark beauty of the high desert, history was made at MAG late last month with the first meeting of the Regional Transportation Policy Committee.

The 25-member committee met Saturday, September 21 in a retreat in the Town of Carefree, with cities, business leaders, state legislators, freight and transit representatives rolling up their sleeves to begin work on the development of a Regional Transportation Plan. The Plan will serve as the transportation blueprint for the region for the next 20-40 years, and is expected to be a critical component in helping voters decide whether to support the extension of the half-cent sales tax. The current sales tax expires in 2005, and is the primary funding source for new freeway construction in the region. Enabling legislation is needed before a vote to extend the tax could be held.

The retreat served to set the scope of work for the committee, and provided members with important background information on the transportation, growth and air quality issues that will play a role in the development of the plan.

Among the issues discussed were elements of the sales tax extension, including the fact that transportation needs exist statewide, across all modes. A 20-year extension (through 2025) would raise an anticipated \$9.0 billion (2002 dollars), but if the length of the tax was extended to 25 years, it would raise approximately \$12 billion.

It was noted that other groups are looking at how the tax should be structured. Once the structure is determined, MAG's role under federal law is to develop the Regional Transportation Plan for this region. The Plan must meet federal air quality requirements, and extensive public involvement is required to build the foundation of the Plan.

It was further noted at the meeting that state legislation passed in 2002 requires performance-based planning, meaning proposed projects will be measured against performance goals such as safety and mobility objectives. Several Committee members brought up the need to provide citizens with

mobility options that offer alternatives and the importance of considering quality of life issues when developing the plan, such as noise mitigation, landscaping, maintenance, etc. Others pointed out that goods movement also needs to be considered during the development of the plan.

Among the key issues discussed during the retreat were air quality challenges. On July 30, a lawsuit was filed by the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest against EPA, challenging its approval of the MAG Serious Area Particulate Plan for PM-10 (particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter). The Committee agreed to vigorously defend the suit, because federal highway funds could be withheld if the suit is successful.

Finally, the Committee set an aggressive timeline for the Plan's development. We look forward to seeing the outcome of the Committee's work in the days and weeks ahead.



Regional Council Meeting Report for September 25, 2002

Council Hears Report on High Capacity Transit Plan

Elected officials are often asked about the possibility of using existing railroad tracks for commuter rail. This policy question led to a study evaluating the possible use of existing railroad corridors for commuter rail. The MAG Regional Council learned more about the information being gathered in the High Capacity Transit Plan Study during a presentation by the project consultant. Along with an examination of commuter rail as a transit option, the study is also examining the use of bus rapid transit or light rail in corridors where operation of conventional commuter rail may encounter significant obstacles. Work on the study has been divided into five milestones:

- ❖ Laying the foundation for the project, including developing a public and agency involvement plan, reviewing prior studies, and outlining basic characteristics of high capacity transit service;
- ❖ Identifying needs and opportunities, including analysis of bus rapid transit, light rail and commuter rail systems across the United States;
- ❖ Identifying alternatives through a general assessment of the feasibility of commuter rail service, outlining a regional commuter rail network, and identifying alternative high capacity concepts;
- ❖ Evaluating alternatives; and
- ❖ Producing the final product – a Regional Commuter Rail/High Capacity Transit Plan.

The project consultant is currently finishing Milestone 4 and is expected to complete the final plan by December 2002. Working papers for the first three milestones are available on the project page on the MAG Web site at www.mag.maricopa.gov.

For more information, please contact Dawn M. Coomer, MAG Multi-Modal Program Manager, (602) 254-6300.

MAG Database Can Help Members with Growth Issues

In an effort to demonstrate how MAG database information can be helpful to member agencies in challenging economic times, MAG unveiled information collected as part of a "Growing Smarter" grant. In May 2000, MAG received a \$295,000 grant from the Federal Highway Administration for a "Regional Growing Smarter Implementation Plan," to be prepared in conjunction with local government plans as part of the Growing Smarter/Plus statutes. As part of this charge, MAG has assembled, with assistance from member agencies, an extensive set of metropolitan regional databases. For example, MAG has developed a major employer database that covers 77 percent of wage and salary employment, as well as GIS databases for existing and planned land uses. In addition, MAG has identified 107 community job centers and their "commute sheds" (areas that fall within 15 or 30 minutes driving time of the centers). Additionally, MAG has assembled key databases for economic development, including indicators of water and sewer infrastructure, demographics and work force characteristics, land and building availability, local tax rates and impact fees, etc. These detailed databases are available for use by member agencies upon request.

It was noted that a discussion of the role/scope of MAG in Regional Development will be held at the October meeting. The October discussion will be for information and discussion, with possible action to be considered at the following meeting in early December.

For more information, please contact Jack Tomasiak, MAG Regional Development Manager, (602) 254-6300.

MAG Approves Funds to Acquire Regional Economic Model

The MAG Regional Council has approved the purchase of the Regional Economic Model, Inc., known in planning circles as the "REMI" model, to assist member agencies in predicting economic trends. The model is a state-of-the-

art regional economic/demographic model that will enable staff to provide more timely projections of socioeconomic data such as population and employment, and for checking data derived from other agencies for accuracy. It will also enable MAG staff to check sales tax forecasts used by the Arizona Department of Transportation.

For more information, contact Jack Tomasik, MAG Regional Development Manager, at (602) 254-6300.

Council Approves Revision to Water Quality Plan

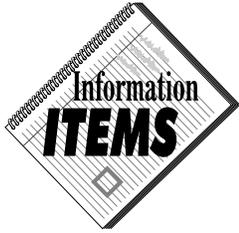
Roger Klingler, Scottsdale Assistant Manager and Chair of the MAG Water Quality Advisory Committee, presented a major revision to the MAG 208 Water Quality Management Plan. The Plan represents a two-year effort by the committee and serves as the key guiding document for wastewater treatment configuration for Maricopa County. Through the current revision effort, 21 new wastewater treatment plants have been added to the MAG 208 Plan, for a total of 97 existing and planned plants. Due to a request from the Central Arizona Association of Governments, the Regional Council clarified that the MAG 208 planning boundary is the Maricopa County boundary and that jurisdictions or portions of jurisdictions outside of Maricopa County are within other planning areas. The Regional Council approved the revision.

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

Homeless Campus Planning Underway

For the past three years, Maricopa County has joined forces with the MAG Continuum of Care Committee to better coordinate services for the homeless and at-risk populations. This coordinated effort revealed that a downtown center was needed to provide better services. County Administrator David Smith, Pinnacle West CEO Marty Shultz, and Maricopa County Project Planner Neil Urban presented an overview of the proposed homeless campus. Amenities of the campus will include 400 beds, a health care center, a day resource center, a safe haven for the seriously mentally ill, education resources, and more. The presenters noted that they hope to present information about the campus to cities before their next Community Development Block Grant funding development cycle.

For more information contact Charlene Moran Flaherty, Homeless Planner, (602) 254-6300.



Information Items

Trail Day Event Sees Seniors Hitting the Trail

Eight Valley cities joined forces to encourage seniors to walk and bike local trails, through a Senior Trail Day sponsored by the Maricopa Association of Governments September 25.

The purpose of Senior Trail Day was to encourage healthy aging while getting people used to alternative transportation modes like biking and walking. Hundreds of Valley seniors participated in the events, which were held concurrently in Chandler, Gilbert, Glendale, Goodyear, Mesa, Phoenix, Scottsdale and Tempe. Participants experienced firsthand the availability and convenience of trails in their neighborhood, while being encouraged to walk or bike the trails to improve their overall well-being. Studies show that physical activity has long-lasting physical and mental health benefits for all age groups, while for seniors, staying active can reduce the morbidity and mortality from many chronic diseases. Funding for the event came from a Healthy Aging 2010 "mini-grant" provided through the Arizona Department of Health Services.

For more information, contact Maureen DeCindis, MAG Transportation Planner, at (602) 254-6300.



Upcoming Events

It's Fiesta Time for MAG at the Mall

Ever thought you could go shopping while at the same time providing your ideas for improving the Valley's transportation system? Well, now you can. The Maricopa Association of Governments, Arizona Department of Transportation, Valley Metro and Valley Metro Rail are hosting a "MAG at the Mall" event at Fiesta Mall in Mesa on Saturday, October 5, 2002. Staff representatives from the participating agencies will be on hand to respond to comments and answer questions about anything transportation related. The event is designed to get input on the Valley's transportation network, including the freeway system, bus service and the new light rail project. Transportation representatives will be available from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. in front of Dillard's Department Store. Fiesta Mall is located at Alma School and Southern in Mesa.

For more information, please contact Jason Stephens, MAG Public Involvement Planner, (602) 254-6300.

Next Regional Council Meeting

The next Regional Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, October 30, 2002 at 5:00 p.m. at the MAG offices, 302 N. 1st Avenue, Suite 200, Phoenix. Agenda items are pending.

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