

## **New slimmed-down Loop 202 would eliminate fewer homes**

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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The parkway concept is out and the old 1980 footprint for the Loop 202 South Mountain Freeway is in, according to the Maricopa Association of Governments, which is responsible for freeway planning.

That means instead of 255 homes on the demolition chopping block, fewer than 100 would have to go to allow construction of what is now tentatively planned to be an eight-lane freeway, down from the previous 10-lane concept.

“That’s not necessarily a bad thing,” said Tim Tait, a spokesman for the Arizona Department of Transportation. “We’re moving from more impactful to less impactful.”

The change also means cost could come down from \$2.47 billion to \$1.9 billion, which is still 90 percent over the original \$1 billion estimate for the 24-mile freeway linking Interstate 10 at Ahwatukee Foothills, which will cut through South Mountain Park and then north along a newly proposed 59th Avenue alignment to reconnect with I-10 in the West Valley.

What bothers Laurel Arndt, an Ahwatukee Foothills resident and member of the South Mountain Citizens’ Advisory Team that for years has been a liaison with ADOT on the freeway’s route, is the sudden jump from route decisions to design considerations.

She said that for years she and other CAT members have wanted to discuss how the design would impact the community, but that they were always steered back to route issues.

Now the route, along Pecos Road, past several schools and through South Mountain, appears to be decided and all that is left is how the design will fit the space available to save money.

“They’ve begun to manipulate the numbers to achieve what they always wanted to do,” Arndt said. “They’re just morphing it into whatever meets their interest.”

But Eric Anderson said that while freeway construction revenues are coming in well under projects, with a \$6 billion hole to fill in the regional transportation plan, the Loop 202 will get funded by eliminating some proposed projects and delaying others.

“The Loop 303 and the South Mountain are our highest priority corridors,” said Anderson, MAG’s transportation director.

“Hopefully, by reducing the footprint we won’t make everybody happy, but as we work through the environmental process we hope we’ll get a green light,” he said.

The draft environmental impact statement, written for a 10-lane freeway, has been on hold for almost a year as sensitive cultural issues with the Gila River Indian Community were worked out.

Tait said the cultural concerns have been essentially resolved, and that once MAG approves

the scaled-back scope of the project, ADOT will revise the draft report and seek federal approval for the freeway that was original proposed more than 30 years ago.

Opponents say development has left the 1985 freeway behind and that the Pecos Road alignment puts a busy freeway too close to schools and homes. The Gila River Indian Community also has passed several resolutions opposing cuts through South Mountain.

Once a draft environmental impact statement is done, a series of community public hearings will take place, where people can comment on the plan.