

Gov't planners to move forward with L-202

[By Doug Murphy](#)

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The South Mountain Loop 202 is one of just two new freeways that planners are recommending to keep basically intact as they try to deal with a looming \$6.6 billion deficit in freeway construction funds.

And despite delays in the draft Environmental Impact Statement and a recent proposal by Councilman Sal DiCiccio to make a good faith offer to the Gila River Indian Community to consider locating the freeway on tribal land, planners are now looking to move forward with the freeway.

“We’re in our ninth year of study and it’s time to make a decision,” said Eric Anderson, transportation director for the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), which oversees freeway planning in the Valley. “We’re anxious to get the environmental impact statement completed and get on with it.”

Other projects, including freeway widening and new construction, are being recommended to be put on hold – saving around \$4 billion – so that the Loop 202 and Loop 303 can be completed, mostly intact.

DiCiccio understands that MAG wants to move forward, but he’s hoping that the agency will also leave open the possibility that a proposal can be made to the Indians that would allow construction south of Pecos Road and possibly eliminate the need to blast through several ridges in South Mountain Park.

“All we want the state to do is make a proposal,” DiCiccio said Tuesday after a MAG meeting to discuss scaling back the Valley’s transportation plan, which was approved by voters in 2003 when they authorized a half-cent sales tax in Maricopa County to pay for the construction.

Anderson wasn’t sure about creating a formal proposal for locating the freeway on tribal land, especially since the tribal council has twice gone on record opposing a freeway on its land, but he said that MAG would consider a proposal by the tribe.

“If the Gila River Indian Community comes forward at some time in the future, and we haven’t started construction, we will look at a proposal,” Anderson said.

The history of the Loop 202 has been full of ups and downs. In 1985 ADOT designed the future route from Interstate 10, along what would become Pecos Road, through South Mountain Park north to reconnect with I-10 around 55th Avenue. Voters approved a half-cent sales tax to pay for freeway construction, but the recession of the 1980s reduced available funding and the Loop 202 was put on the back-burner. The city of Phoenix proposed to build a parkway, but ADOT said no. Later a toll road was attempted, but the consortium pulled out after a few months.

In 2000 ADOT pulled the plans back out and created a citizens advisory group to help update

the 1985 plan. After years of meetings and discussion the committee recommended the west-side route to go through Tolleson and connect to the existing I-10/Loop 101 interchange. But then-ADOT director Victor Mendez vetoed the suggestion, instead affirming the original route around 55th Avenue.

In the last decade, the estimated price of the freeway jumped from just under \$1 billion to \$2.4 billion. By reducing the number of lanes to eight, which reduced the number of Ahwatukee Foothills homes that have to be demolished, and changing the western route to 59th Avenue to save money in connection costs to I-10, MAG and ADOT think they can keep costs under control.

But Anderson admitted that revenues for freeway construction have been down for the past 22 months and no one is sure if the end is in sight, or if the current \$6.6 billion deficit will continue to grow.