

## [Phoenix](#)

### Panel set to vote on Loop 202 extension proposal today

by **Cathryn Creno** - Oct. 21, 2009 09:47 AM  
The Arizona Republic

A Maricopa Association of Governments committee is expected to approve a plan Wednesday to extend Loop 202 for 22 miles through Ahwatukee and South Mountain Park, connecting Chandler to Laveen with an eight-lane freeway.

The MAG Transportation Policy Committee meets at 4 p.m. in the MAG Saguaro Room, 302 N.1st Avenue in Phoenix.

The planned 22-mile South Mountain Freeway would cost \$1.9 billion - about \$570 million less than an earlier 10-lane freeway proposed by transportation officials. It would start at Interstate 10 at Pecos Road and end at I-10 and 59th Avenue.

After the vote, the MAG Regional Council is expected to give final approval to the plan on Oct. 28.

Many Ahwatukee residents oppose the extension of the 202 through the community and South Mountain, saying the traffic would bring noise and pollution and possibly harm wildlife in the park.

"Even though we are in this big city of Phoenix, it's like our own little town in Ahwatukee," said Brian Smith, who has volunteered time on the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team, a board that advises ADOT on community freeway impact.

"It's hard to have that sense of community in a place like Phoenix. A freeway coming in could destroy that."

Smith also said MAG's plan would create "significant, irreparable" damage to South Mountain Park.

Chad Blostone, a long-time freeway opponent who now heads an eight-member committee to fight the freeway put together by Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio, said he does not believe the freeway would help alleviate traffic congestion in Ahwatukee or on Interstate 10. He thinks most drivers are heading north to work in the mornings, not west.

"The freeway plan is not about citizens," he said. "It's about trucks that need to bypass downtown Phoenix and get to warehouses in west Phoenix."

Not so, say freeway supporters like those in Laveen who are counting on the 202 to bring economic development to their side of town.

"Delaying the freeway any longer is holding up progress," Phoenix City Councilman Michael Nowakowski, who represents District 7 in West Phoenix.

"In Laveen, we need development. We need a hospital. We want more retail. Developers have told us that we need the freeway to come through for this to come in."

He appealed to freeway opponents to consider the traffic needs of metro Phoenix, not just their own part of town.

"We need to look for the betterment of the whole city of Phoenix with the Loop 202," Nowakowski said. "We don't want to become another LA with traffic jam after traffic jam."

Some Ahwatukee residents are starting to say it's time to stop the debate and make a decision.

Most homeowners and real estate salespeople with listings near the freeway path acknowledge that the bad economy is hurting the housing market. But they say the freeway debate is making things even worse.

Susan Miller is a real estate saleswoman who has a listing in a neighborhood right next to one that would be taken out by the freeway. A few years ago the 1,600-square-foot house near Desert Vista High School would have been snapped up quickly. But it has lingered on the market for more than 100 days, even at a reduced price of \$199,000, Miller said.

"It's been awful - one complication after another," she said.

"Two years ago, these homes appraised at \$950,000," said Bridget Shaffer, who lives in another subdivision near the freeway path called Foothills Reserve. "I had my home appraised a year ago at \$575,000, I had it appraised 4 months ago at \$350,000.

"When I first moved here a year ago, we could not have cars in the street, basketball hoops out front, garbage cans sitting out and bushes and trees and hedges had to be trimmed. Now, anything goes."

All the more reason to move forward with the extension of Loop 202, which is expected to take out about 100 Ahwatukee homes that are in its path, transportation officials say. Homes that are left after the freeway is constructed will have walls to protect them from excess noise, officials

say.

"Let's get the people of Ahwatukee out of their ambiguous situation," said MAG transportation director Eric Anderson.

Anderson and other MAG officials met last week with DiCiccio and other officials and agreed to a proposal by the councilman to talk with members of the Gila River Indian Community about routing the 202 south of Ahwatukee on tribal land.

But Anderson said people who live in Ahwatukee should not hold their breath.

"We want to accommodate the councilman's desire," Anderson said.

"But we also talked with a representative from the Gila River Indian Community and they confirmed that they have a (tribal council) resolution in place against the freeway on tribal land. The tribe has accepted that the freeway will be on Pecos and they want to move forward and talk about traffic interchanges."

Gila River spokeswoman Alia Maisonet did not return phone calls about whether a meeting between MAG and the Gila River Tribal Council has been set up.

If MAG approves the freeway, the Arizona Department of Transportation would then spend the next two years completing its study of the environmental impact of the proposed freeway for the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration.

Construction is not expected to begin until 2013 and the freeway would not be finished until 2017, said Tim Tait, ADOT spokesman.