

SOUTH MOUNTAIN

DISTRICT NEWS

Two South Mountain Freeway Options Considered For Laveen

Tom Trush, South Mountain District News
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On Tuesday, Feb. 22, representatives from the Arizona Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and the Maricopa Association of Governments, along with the City of Phoenix, held a public meeting to show local residents two proposed options for the South Mountain Freeway through Laveen.

Stretching from Baseline to Elliot Roads, the routes extend from 61st Avenue west to 63rd Avenue and tie in with the 59th Avenue Alignment Alternative.

The 63rd Avenue Alternative, which is not consistent with the City of Phoenix General Plan, was originally presented to the public in November 2005 and identified as the preliminary preferred build alternative seven months later.

The 61st Avenue Alternative goes along with the General Plan and follows the 1988 alignment. However, it also threatens properties deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, while the 63rd Avenue option avoids them.

Tim Tait, community relations director for ADOT, told a standing-room-only crowd of about 150 people at Betty H. Fairfax High School that construction costs for each option are roughly the same. In addition, he said a deadline for a decision is not in place and a no-build option on the entire freeway is still a possibility.

"We don't know what will happen," added Tait, who stressed comments from the public are part of the evaluation process for the two options. "This is not a done deal – there is still a lot of work to do."

Part of that work includes finishing the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the entire freeway and making it available for a 90-day public review. Completion is expected before the end of this year.

Once the public-review process is complete, a final Environmental Impact Statement will be drafted and released for community input for 60 days. Public comments will then be considered again before a final decision on the proposed freeway is made.

Although a construction timeline is not in place, Chaun Hill, ADOT project manager for the South Mountain Freeway, told meeting attendees that July 2013 is when the first available construction funding could be approved. The decision on where to start construction – if the freeway is built – has not been determined.

The freeway's alignment on the other side of South Mountain still remains in question. Last summer, ADOT announced that two potential routes were being explored on the Gila River Indian Community. In addition to causing less damage to the South Mountain Preserve, a route on the Gila River Indian Community could save many homes that are threatened with the current alignment.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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