

Opposition to Loop 202 spreads to Indian community

[By Doug Murphy Ahwatukee Foothills News](#)

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Until now, the most vocal opponents of the South Mountain Loop 202 have come from Ahwatukee Foothills.

But on Wednesday a large group of Gila River Indian Community members also added their voices to those opposing the freeway along Pecos Road and through South Mountain.

“Our council has made the decision to oppose this. I will oppose this every step of the way,” Joseph Morago told Maricopa Association of Governments Transportation Policy Committee.

They made it clear that cutting through the ridges of South Mountain would violate what they consider a sacred area.

“South Mountain is part of who we are,” said Kevin Jose. “Establishing a freeway kills us.”

They also said that while some Ahwatukee Foothills homeowners have lived on their land for 325 years, tribal members have lived on their land for 2,500 years and building the freeway south of Pecos Road was not an option.

In 2004 Gila River Indian Community member Priscilla Antone summed up her opposition to the freeway when she told ADOT “We have the same concerns as a lot of you. We don’t want pollution. We do care about air quality. We care about noise. We are human beings.”

The strong opposition could doom Councilman Sal DiCiccio’s hopes that the state will make a proposal to the Indian tribe that involves more than just dollars for acres, in return for allowing construction of the freeway south of Pecos Road.

Despite the strong opposition to current plans to build the freeway through South Mountain Park, cutting deeply into several ridges, the transportation committee unanimously approved a funding package that deals with a \$6.6 billion construction shortfall and allocates \$1.9 billion for the freeway’s construction.

Mesa Mayor Scott Smith made the motion to approve the funding package, admitting that none of the options were ideal. But he also said that with increased traffic the Valley needs new transportation options.

“None of the solutions are perfect, but as a region we have needs that can’t be ignored,” Smith said.

The freeway’s main purpose is to connect residents in Laveen, Estrella and the West Valley with major employers like Motorola and Intel in the East Valley, traffic engineers say. But opponents fear it will quickly become a truck by-pass, routing semis past Ahwatukee Foothills homes and a half-dozen schools.

The cost of the freeway has more than doubled in the last few years as sales tax revenues

plummet.

To meet the new financial constraints the size of the freeway has been reduced from 10 lanes to eight and other “value engineering” changes have been made, including connecting the freeway to Interstate 10 at 59th Avenue, instead of 55th Avenue, to save cost.

With the financial question answered ADOT can now proceed with the draft environmental impact statement, which could be done by summer.