



S. Mtn. freeway group mulls next move

Colleen Sparks

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There's a long road ahead before the fate of the proposed South Mountain Freeway will be decided, and several Ahwatukee Foothills residents spot a bumpy route.

The South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team met at South Mountain Community College Thursday night but the group did not take formal action on whether it wants to see the freeway built.

Arizona Department of Transportation officials and a Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) engineer answered questions.

"I know I'm preaching to the choir when I say Phoenix is growing," said Bob Hazlett, a MAG senior engineer, adding that the freeway project had been discussed on a regional level since 1983.

Despite ADOT and MAG officials' contention that the freeway would alleviate traffic congestion in Ahwatukee, and reduce Valley traffic commuters' frustrations from the east to the west, some residents aren't convinced it would help the village.

"It seems counter-intuitive that traffic will go down," in Ahwatukee, said Bill Ramsay, an Ahwatukee resident and director of Protecting Arizona's Children and Resources (PARC), a freeway opposition group.

"Hopefully, this committee will see what a horrific impact it will have on Ahwatukee," he said.

Some residents and committee members said they aren't confident ADOT will follow the committee's recommendations on whether the freeway should be expanded. That's because ADOT plans to connect the freeway to Interstate 10 at 55th Avenue, despite the committee's recommendations to connect it at Loop 101.

The 55th Avenue spot was chosen because a traffic analysis showed it would spread out traffic better, it received support from affected cities and connecting at Loop 101 would have negatively impacted Tolleson's economy, said Doug Nintzel, and ADOT spokesman.

Jim Jochim, a PARC director, asked whether a decision on the eastern leg was already "in the pre-decisional mode."

"Your mission is to come to a decision of build vs. no build," ADOT director of communications Matt Burdick said to the committee. "You will have the opportunity . . . to develop your criteria."

The committee did not account for everything when it studied the western alignment, Burdick said.

The committee tentatively plans to meet Sept. 20 at the community college. It also plans to tour the proposed freeway in October.