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## CAT: No trust in ADOT - Recommendation on freeway route was ignored last year

By Doug Murphy

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When the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team (CAT) was created in 2002 to provide input and feedback to the Arizona Department of Transportation on the updated design and route of the South Mountain Loop 202 freeway, no one could have predicted the distrust that would develop between the two groups.

Made up of volunteers representing a variety of interested groups along the proposed freeway route, CAT met 40 times, hearing technical reports and providing feedback on the west-side route of the proposed freeway, from roughly South Mountain Park to Interstate 10.

After a meeting last week with the CAT and ADOT officials, to prepare studying possible routes in the east, through Ahwatukee Foothills, it was very clear that ADOT will need to re-establish some trust with members of the CAT before anything can be done.

The bad feeling among many of the CAT members stems from last year's decision by ADOT director Victor Mendez to ignore the recommendation of the CAT to route the freeway along 99th Avenue and connect to Interstate 10 at the Loop 101 interchange. Instead, Mendez overruled the CAT in favor of the old 1985 route up 55th Avenue.

"Some of the frustration was over how we were treated," said Mike Goodman, a member of the CAT representing the Phoenix Mountain Preservation Council.

He was referring to how, after years of study and being told that money and politics shouldn't matter, the team made a route recommendation, then two months later was called into Mendez's office June 29, 2006 and told that the recommendation would be set aside in favor of the 55th Avenue alignment because it was less expensive and because it had more political support.

That decision prompted one out of three CAT members to resign, including Kris Black who represented The Foothills HOA.

At the time she called the process "frustrating as all get out."

"I'm disappointed that ADOT chose to make what I believe is a politically-based decision that doesn't get the citizens of metropolitan Phoenix a functional freeway system. I think they kowtowed to the politicians," Black said last year.

For Rock Argabright, also a member of the team representing the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce, the announcement was the last straw.

"I will not go to another meeting. I've wasted four years of my time, why should I come to another meeting?"

Other problems that CAT members brought up were meetings where there was no topic and information to study, not enough information available to make reasoned recommendations, a lack of air quality information and how a freeway would impact children at nearby schools and a frustration that the study area was kept artificially small so that the only eventual outcome possible would be a freeway along Pecos Road.

Last week most new and old members of the CAT said that building trust and understanding what ADOT expected of them was important before they would commit time to study the freeway that is currently slated to run where Pecos Road is.

"I thought the way it transpired was good and important," said Carola Tamarkin, a new member of the CAT representing the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce. "It cleared out all the muck so we could get a clean start."

At the CAT's next meeting April 26, ADOT spokesman Matt Burdick said that

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he would go into details explaining Mendez's decision. The CAT will also finalize some procedural policies before it starts looking at the freeway plan, probably in early summer.

The Loop 202 was original conceived in 1985 as a four-lane freeway with a median running from I-10 in Ahwatukee Foothills, through South Mountain and north to reconnect with I-10  
In Ahwatukee Foothills about 255 homes are in the revised right of way.

The freeway would also pass within feet of a half-dozen schools, raising concerns about air quality and safety.

Voters in 2005 passed Proposition 400, which allocated about \$1.3 billion for the South Mountain Loop 202.

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