

[Ahwatukee](#)

City leaders have only indirect influence on 202 plans

by **Cathryn Creno** - Aug. 3, 2009 07:46 AM
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The construction of the proposed South Mountain Freeway extension along Pecos Road has emerged as a key issue in the race for the Phoenix City Council District 6 seat.

How much say would a Phoenix council member actually have in the debate over whether to build a state freeway in Ahwatukee Foothills and through the South Mountain preserve?

Officially, none.

"There is absolutely no city vote on it and there will be no city vote," said Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio. "The freeway is not under the jurisdiction of the city."

The Maricopa Association of Governments is charged with coming up with the plan and funds for the freeway extension, which would connect Loop 202 from Chandler to west Phoenix. The Arizona Department of Transportation will conduct required federal environmental studies and, once plans are approved, build the freeway.

Still, state and local officials say Phoenix has plenty of indirect influence on the matter.

"The freeway is not a done deal," said Timothy Tait, community relations for the state transportation department.

"Phoenix does have a lot influence. Not with Phoenix City Council per se, but through MAG. Phoenix has a major influence through MAG."

DiCiccio, who faces three challengers in the Sept. 1 election for his seat, said that is why the freeway issue surfaced as a hot issue in a recent candidates forum sponsored by the Ahwatukee Foothills Chamber of Commerce.

"MAG does make the final determination on whether the freeway is built," DiCiccio said. "But that does not mean the city of Phoenix and I cannot be a forceful voice in the conversation."

The latest plan for the extension of Loop 202 calls for an eight-lane 22-mile freeway through Ahwatukee and the South Mountain preserve.

The cost would be \$1.9 billion and construction could begin by 2017, said MAG transportation director Eric Anderson. There has been no public discussion of the latest freeway plan. Anderson the MAG Regional Council and the MAG Transportation Policy Committee, have copies of the draft and will meet for a discussion in October.

In March, MAG planners proposed building a 45-mile-per-hour parkway for Ahwatukee's section of the proposed South Mountain Freeway, That plan replaced an earlier proposed 10-lane freeway.

The so-called Arizona Parkway would have been an eight-lane roadway with a speed limit of 45 mph and a pattern of routing traffic turning left into a system of U-turns every one eighth mile.

That proposal did not satisfy Ahwatukee residents who want no freeway extension at all, Anderson said.

Also, he said, there were concerns that a parkway would lengthen travel time for those traveling from one side of the Valley to the other and would create safety issues for drivers who were suddenly forced to slow from 65-miles-per-hour to 45 when they hit the South Mountain section of the 202.

"From a regional perspective it just didn't work," Anderson said.

The parkway plan would have required less right-of-way so possibly no Ahwatukee homes would have had to have been destroyed for the freeway construction. Earlier plans called for the destruction of 250 to 500 homes that were in the path of the proposed 10-lane freeway.

Anderson said an eight-lane freeway would reduce the number of homes that will be destroyed "by two-thirds."

Still, many Ahwatukee residents oppose any sort of extension of the 202 through the community.

Ahwatukee resident Jim Jochim heads a group called PARC - Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children - which contends a freeway along the Pecos Road corridor would bring more noise and pollution into the community and disrupt the South Mountain preserve.

"Trust me, if they are proposing eight lanes it eventually will be 10," he said about MAG's newest plan.

None of the candidates for the District 6 council seat say they support the freeway. Two candidates, DiCiccio and Barry Pacey, a general

contractor from the Arcadia section of Phoenix, voiced specific strategies to fight it at the recent council debate.

Paceley said he favors pushing for delays in the freeway approval process while negotiating with the Gila River Indian Community just south of Ahwatukee to allow the freeway on its land.

DiCiccio said he is not certain Gila River is any more interested in a freeway than people in Ahwatukee.

He said that, if elected, he would put together a task force of Ahwatukee residents who have a variety of views on the freeway. He would ask the group to come up with a proposal that works for the majority of people in the community.

"If our community bickers and fights over this thing we will look like a divisive group. That won't get us anywhere," he said. "We can have a voice if we work together and see what we can do to mitigate this."