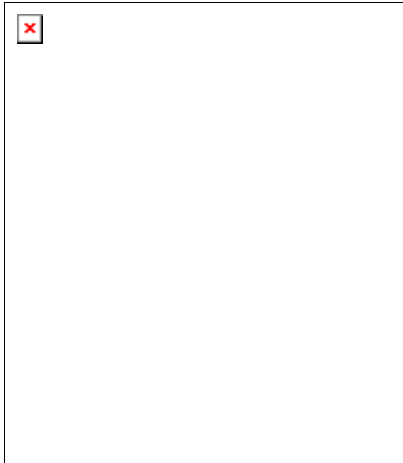




Risks and alternatives to the Loop 202

[Commentary by Pat Lawlis](#)

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The Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) would have us believe that the Pecos alignment is the only alternative for the South Mountain Freeway (SMF). In our view, the Pecos alignment is not and has never been a viable alternative. Yet viable alternatives existed when MAG first proposed the SMF 25 years ago, and they still exist today.

MAG is just locked into the Pecos alignment, which is a worse idea now than it was 25 years ago! It should be MAG's responsibility to find the best alternatives for transportation in the Valley of the Sun, but that has not happened. So we have questions – many questions.

ADOT's latest excuse for not talking with the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) about possibly putting the freeway across their land is that it might cost more than the Pecos alignment. First, is this a legitimate question when just considering possibilities? Second, why don't we also compare the risks of building the freeway on GRIC

land as opposed to the risks of:

- Introducing accentuated air and noise pollution into a populated basin that is walled in by South Mountain.
- Moving wells.
- Disturbing wildlife and water runoff patterns.
- Introducing erosion problems that are a certainty because of blasting through South Mountain.
- Desecrating land that is sacred to many people.
- Setting a precedent of destroying a part of the Phoenix Mountain Preserve (which obviously was intended to be preserved).
- Destroying a portion of the world's largest wilderness municipal park in South Mountain Park.

The risk of building the SMF on GRIC land would be resolved before any decision is made – the risk of whether Gila River people would see a benefit in having the freeway on their land. The risk of building the SMF along the Pecos alignment comes from the "Humpty Dumpty effect" after a decision is made and after destruction has occurred that cannot be reversed!

Is this good regional transportation planning? Or is this a coward's way out? Is the bully who loves to use the hammer of eminent domain unable to cope with the prospect of having to be respectful to people to provide a scenario that would benefit all concerned?

How about the risk of getting approval to build the SMF along the Pecos alignment? MAG never talks about this, but with all the hanky panky that has occurred over the 25 years since the SMF has been

proposed, there is good reason to believe that MAG would lose a court challenge to the Pecos alignment. That loss would occur after many years in court, including appeals, with nothing happening on the SMF for all that time.

What about the owners of the properties along this alignment who would be in limbo for all that time? Does MAG care? Then if MAG loses in court after all that, the property owners would finally get the answer that they should have today – that the SMF would not be built on the Pecos alignment.

And then what? MAG would have to start over. Does it take all that time and wasted money on engineers and attorneys and court costs to get MAG to see what reasonable people already can see – there are viable alternatives to the Pecos alignment?!

Is MAG really interested in regional traffic? If this is really their concern, why have they not considered using light rail as a solution? It would cost half as much and not introduce an unnecessary and polluting truck by-pass into the Valley. It should also be possible to build light rail without having to blast through South Mountain as long as the GRIC is included in planning.

Isn't it likely that the GRIC would agree to have a light rail line that could get people to the Wild Horse Pass area? Isn't it also likely that they would be open to allowing it to go across a small piece of their land if that would avoid having to blast through South Mountain?

Providing a "good" solution for regional traffic in the South Mountain corridor could be a win for everyone. Light rail along Pecos Road could contain an extended bike path along with new park-and-ride lots, improving – rather than destroying – the way of life in Ahwatukee.

Or does MAG really have a different, hidden agenda? Are they really trying to push through the SMF so their friends in the trucking industry can get a short cut through the city?

So many questions with so few answers. Just one more question. Will you join Protecting Arizona's Resources and Children (PARC) in an effort to hold MAG and ADOT to serving the people – not political agendas – by providing sound, responsible transportation solutions for the Valley of the Sun? Together we can make a difference.

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