



Congressman says alternative for Loop 202 would be valuable

By [Doug Murphy](#)

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The number of people encouraging a new look at the route for the South Mountain Loop 202 freeway grew by at least one on Monday when Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.), chairman of the House Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, was given a tour and briefing by the Arizona Department of Transportation on the \$1.9 billion, 22-mile-long proposed freeway route.

“My overall view is that (construction) would solve a lot of problems for the metropolitan area,” DeFazio said. “But there are a lot of concerns about ADOT’s alignment.”

“I think it’s valuable to consider alternatives,” he added.

The original 1985 plan called for a freeway where Pecos Road now is, traveling west through a corner of South Mountain, then north to reconnect with Interstate 10.

Opponents of the freeway argue that since 1985 development has moved beyond the original freeway plans, which are now outdated and need a major revision.

DeFazio said that situation is common across the nation when it comes to freeway planning.

“This is not at all atypical. I just had an occurrence like this in Oregon,” he said with old freeway plans being used to solve new transportation problems.

“They said we have a design here and blow the dust off it. And unfortunately in 30 years lots of changes have occurred,” DeFazio said, adding that after everyone got together an alternative was found that those involved could agree to.

In the last few months an effort lead by Councilman Sal DiCiccio and supported by Congressman Harry Mitchell has been encouraging the state to take a serious look at an alternative route, south of Pecos Road, on the Gila River Indian Community land.

The problem is that twice the tribal council has passed resolutions opposing a freeway on the Indian land.

But Gov. William Rhodes, in his State of the Gila River Indian Community speech in January, said that it appears that a handful are holding back possible development by opposing the freeway.

“At some point a new poll or new vote has to be taken that involves more than just a handful of people in our community,” Rhodes said.

The tour on Monday, which included Mitchell (D-Ariz.) comes as ADOT is attempting to wrap-up an eight-year-long Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

“The time for talk is just about over. We’ve got to move on this,” said Tim Tait, a spokesman for ADOT.

But Tait also reiterated that if the Gila River Indian Community were to proposed an alternative route, it would be considered at any time in the planning process.

As early as this week tribal officials are expected to give permission to ADOT engineers to travel onto the reservation to look at possible alternatives.

Then it would be up to the tribal council to formally ask ADOT to submit a proposal for consideration.

"I always hold out hope for that – it would be a win-win," Mitchell said.

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