



## South Mountain Freeway vote soon, Gila River tribe says

by **Cathryn Creno** - Dec. 8, 2010 07:54 AM  
The Arizona Republic

A decision about whether to allow the alignment of the planned South Mountain Freeway to be moved south of Ahwatukee Foothills to the Gila River Indian Reservation could be made by tribal officials in January.

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Alia Maisonet, spokeswoman for the Gila River Indian Tribal Council, said that between now and next month, community members will attend meetings at which they can voice views and ask questions about a possible extension of Loop 202 on reservation land.

After that, she said, the council will either vote on whether to approve the freeway, or put the issue on a ballot for the community to decide.

"What's going on right now is we need to gather comments from our community members as part of the decision-making process," Maisonet said.

The first meeting, in Gila River's District 6 south of Ahwatukee and Chandler, took place Saturday, she said.

Community members who attended the meeting viewed maps of the current **planned** alignment - a 22-mile eight-lane freeway that would connect Laveen to Chandler through Ahwatukee and South Mountain Park - and a new plan to build the freeway about a half-mile south of Ahwatukee on reservation land, she said.

"There were more questions than comments," Maisonet said. "There was a lot of concern for the cultural and economic impact of the freeway altogether, not just on the reservation. There were questions about how it would impact people in terms of things like air **quality**."

Current plans call for Loop 202 to take out a church and more than 100 homes in Ahwatukee Foothills and an additional 64 in south Phoenix, and cut through three ridges in the South Mountain preserve.

Officials from the Maricopa Association of Governments, the Arizona Department of Transportation and Gila River's

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transportation technical team have been meeting since August to discuss alternatives.

Tribal officials, including Gov. William Rhodes, have said the primary motivation for the freeway talks is not economic. Rather, they say they are interested in protecting the ecology of South Mountain.

Maisonet said comments made by community members on Saturday also reflected that.

"There were comments made that this is not about the economy," she said.

Ahwatukee residents who oppose having the freeway cut through their community and the mountain said they were encouraged to hear that Gila River's freeway discussion is moving forward.

"I think a half mile south of Pecos (Road) is a good and reasonable compromise," said David Caplan, who lives in a west Ahwatukee neighborhood that is within blocks of the current alignment.

"Any news that the Gila community is considering aligning the 202 on their land is good news," said Chad Blostone, a member of the Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee and a longtime freeway opponent.

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