

Looks of South Mountain Freeway a growing concern

7 comments by [Cathryn Creno](#) - Jan. 25, 2010 01:27 PM
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While officials ponder whether a new section of Loop 202 should be built on land owned by the state or on the [Gila River Indian Community](#), a secondary issue has started to percolate:

What will the planned South Mountain Freeway look and sound like?

"I think what they have planned right now will be unattractive," said [Phoenix City Councilman](#) Sal DiCiccio, who favors having the freeway connecting Chandler to west Phoenix built in an unpopulated section of the Gila River community instead of through Ahwatukee and [South Mountain](#).

"Phoenix has no money for upgrades," he added. "And I think we will hear noise as far as Warner Road because some of the freeway is going to be built above grade."

When the [Maricopa Association of Governments](#) approved the planned \$1.9 billion extension of Loop 202 in July, it touted the plan as "value engineering."

"Value" means the [Arizona Department of Transportation](#) will seek ways to build the freeway at the lowest cost possible.

But MAG senior engineer Bob Hazlett said that does not mean that the South Mountain will be constructed with cheap materials, smaller noise walls or fewer design elements than other sections of the Loop 202, such as the Santan Freeway.

"Value does not mean cheaper construction," he said. "It won't have narrower lanes, it will have noise walls and quiet pavement. It will have the same basic landscaping as you see on the Santan."

The most controversial part of the South Mountain plan is a proposal to build it at and above ground level instead of building it below grade to reduce noise and hide it from view.

Hazlett said the South Mountain will be at grade in some places and rise as high as 18 feet to accommodate traffic passing underneath in others.

Another way freeway planners intend to reduce the freeway's cost is to include HOV lanes right from the start instead of going back and adding them later - as was the case on busy Loop 101 between Chandler and

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Scottsdale.

Plans also call for a construction of a \$25 million bicycle and hiking trail alongside part of the freeway, from approximately 17th Avenue to 51st Avenue, he said.

If Phoenix wants design elements, such as those along the Loop 101 in Scottsdale, it will have to find a way to pay for them under the value engineering plan, Hazlett said.

MAG's assurances do not ease the concerns of DiCiccio or longtime South Mountain Freeway opponents like Chad Blostone, who serves on the [Ahwatukee Foothills Village Planning Committee](#) and ADOT's South Mountain Citizen's Advisory Team.

If the freeway winds up going through Ahwatukee instead of tribal land, DiCiccio and Blostone would like to see it constructed below grade to minimize noise and also feature decorative upgrades similar to those on the Loop 101 in Scottsdale. Blostone doesn't believe the cost of decorative upgrades should be borne by Phoenix taxpayers alone.

"I'm focused on the noise," DiCiccio said. "It's something no one has really given any thought to."

Blostone, a pilot for US Airways, said he has concluded that communities that "value engineering is great for the people who are paying for the project, but horrible for the community that the freeway is in.

"When I fly over the Valley, I see all kinds of freeways that are built below grade to mitigate noise and negative visual effects. That is not what they are proposing now."

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