

Ahwatukee residents still concerned over look of new freeway

by [Cathryn Creno](#) - Jan. 29, 2010 04:34 PM
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Ahwatukee Foothills residents who are worried that the planned South Mountain Freeway will be noisy and ugly got no reassurance at a Thursday meeting of the [Arizona Department of Transportation's](#) South Mountain Citizens Advisory Committee.

About 75 people who attended the meeting were told that ADOT cannot afford to build the extension of Loop 202 - planned to connect Chandler to [west Phoenix](#) through the Foothills and South Mountain Park - below grade.

Some team members and many Ahwatukee residents want the freeway built below ground because they believe it will be more attractive and less noisy.

"The cost estimates to build the freeway below grade are staggering," [Maricopa Association of Governments](#) senior engineer Bob Hazlett said. "We are in a fiscal crisis. There has been a huge decline in sales tax revenues since the summer of 2007."

MAG has spent the past year evaluating it's plans for a Valley-wide [freeway system](#) because of the state budget crisis. Last summer it decided to go ahead with plans for the \$1.9 billion South Mountain Freeway, and Thursday's meeting was the first time in more than a year that the 25-member advisory team has met.

By fall, the advisory team is expected to make a non-binding recommendation on whether or not the South Mountain has met community expectations.

Before that, the team will review reports on the impact of [air pollution](#) that would be created by the freeway and a federal environmental impact study of the planned route. ADOT is expected to hold public hearings on the South Mountain Freeway this summer and fall.

At Thursday's meeting, team members and about 50 people in the audience listened to a report about how the recession has forced MAG to postpone plans for some freeway projects and reduce the scale of others, including the South Mountain Freeway.

The freeway will be smaller than originally planned - eight lanes instead of 10. Plans also call for it to be built at and above grade

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to avoid the expense of building a pricy drainage system deep below ground, Hazlett said.

Paul Everett, who represents the Phoenix's Ahwatukee Village Planning Committee on the team, said he did not understand why [ADOT](#) did not simply handle storm runoff with aquifers, or small canals, above a recessed freeway.

"They build these everywhere," he said. "Even the Romans built them."

ADOT spokesman Tim Tait said after the meeting that the idea had been considered by the agency but discarded as impractical.

"We have to control the amount of runoff that goes from South Mountain to the Gila River Indian Community," he said. "There is too much water to control to use small canals."

Several audience members who oppose the freeway, meanwhile, submitted written questions asking why the South Mountain was not simply cancelled when the state started to run low on money.

Many residents in Ahwatukee and elsewhere oppose the freeway because it would require the destruction of homes in Ahwatukee and

three ridges in South Mountain Park.

Hazlett said an extension of the 202 is needed to reduce traffic on Interstate 10 and to provide another way to move east and west in Maricopa County.

"We look at it as a system." He said. "The South Mountain has always been a priority."

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