

Parkway may edge out freeway for Loop 202

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The idea of parkways replacing freeways is starting to gain some traction in Arizona's transportation community, mainly due to massive budget woes, more than \$5 billion in Maricopa County alone, that make traditional freeways too expensive.

And the South Mountain Loop 202 may be the guinea pig in the parkway debate.

"We still have to make certain we're in a situation where we don't create more problems than we solve," said Bob Hazlett, a senior traffic engineer with the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG), who said there still needs to be a lot of study on the parkway concept.

The idea is to duplicate what is commonly called a "Michigan parkway" design, where traffic isn't allowed to make left turns at intersections. ([See an example here.](#))

Instead, motorists travel past the intersection, then move into a turn lane in the median, where they in effect complete a U-turn then move to the right and exit onto the cross street, thanks to the large gaps in traffic that the no-left turn rule creates.

An added benefit to a parkway, Hazlett said, is that by eliminating left turns at intersections, the number of crashes are reduced because there are only 16 possible movements at an intersection instead of 32.

While a parkway isn't a magic bullet in the transportation engineer's arsenal, it does have advantages, including:

- * Less land is needed because there are fewer lanes and water retention can be contained in the 60-foot-wide median.
- * They generally require basic signalized intersections instead of expensive on and off ramps, as long as traffic volumes are low on the cross streets.
- * A parkway carries more traffic per day than an equally sized surface street because there are fewer delays due to no left turns.

"I like the concept," said Councilman Sal DiCiccio, although he wants more details.

Jim Jochim, an opponent of the Loop 202 on Pecos Road, is wary of the parkway substitute because he said there are many questions that haven't been answered, including:

- * How a parkway would cut through ridges in South Mountain Park that the Gila River Indian Community consider sacred.

* How a parkway with 90,000 vehicles a day could fill the requirements for a freeway that the Arizona Department of Transportation said was needed to carry an estimated 190,000 vehicles a day.

* What impact a parkway would have on schools that back onto or are within a block of two of the proposed road.

Hazlett also admits there are questions that need studying.

The Pecos Road stretch of the proposed Loop 202 has no cross traffic. So if signals are installed preventing left turns from 32nd Street or 40th Street onto Pecos Road it would seem superfluous.

At the same time, there are major streets, including Van Buren Street and Lower Buckeye Road, that cross the proposed Loop 202 in the West Valley that would require the more expensive traditional freeway interchanges.

But it's not clear if even a parkway design can cut the cost enough to save the Loop 202.

Originally priced at just under \$1 billion, by 2003 it was up to \$1.1 billion and is now estimated to cost \$2.4 billion, a 40 percent increase in two years and a 120 percent increase in roughly five years.

And with all projects in the voter-approved Proposition 400 more expensive than expected, some projects may have to be abandoned.

MAG will look at the transportation projects included in Proposition 400 and consider maintaining the current schedule, but extending it over more than the original 20-year timeline, reducing the scope of projects or blending both ideas.

Hazlett said a final decision on revamping the Valley's transposition plan may not come until fall.

Then the Arizona Department of Transportation would need to re-write some portions of a draft environmental impact statement it has been working on over the past few years to take into account any changes to the scope and design of the Loop 202 before asking for federal approval and seeking public comment.