

South Mountain Freeway route: No date set for tribal vote

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Despite hopes by some that the Gila River Tribal Council would vote in May on whether the planned South Mountain Freeway would be built on reservation land instead of through Ahwatukee, the decision is still at least several weeks away.

No state or federal deadlines exist for a decision on whether to change the freeway route, said Kelly Taft, communications manager for the Maricopa Association of Governments.

And Tribal Council spokeswoman Alia Maisonet said the council has not been pressured to rush the decision from MAG, which manages the funds for the planned \$1.9 billion extension of Loop 202, or the Arizona Department of Transportation, which will manage its construction.

Maisonet said the tribe's transportation technical team is still compiling engineering and environmental studies of two potential freeway routes just south of Pecos Road as well as the results of a communitywide opinion survey about the freeway.

She said Tribal Council subcommittees, including those that oversee natural resources, economic development and government, will review the information and possibly request more before a vote of the entire council.

"The subcommittees have been known to kick reports back" for more information, Maisonet said.

If the tribe approves a reservation freeway route, it likely would run south from 51st Avenue in Phoenix past Pecos Road and onto Gila River land. It would connect with the eastern edge of Loop 202 just beyond 48th Street and Pecos Road.

MAG and ADOT officials have said the new route would be an at-grade freeway with exits at 51st Avenue, 17th Avenue, Desert Foothills Parkway, 24th Street and 40th Street. There also would be wildlife crossings at 51st and 17th avenues.

Plans for the South Mountain Freeway call for a 22-mile, eight-lane roadway that runs southwest from 59th Avenue and then along Pecos Road through Ahwatukee.