Where has support for the freeway gone?

By Laurel Arndt

Recently in the Ahwatukee Foothills News it was reported that residents in Ahwatukee no longer support the completion of the South Mountain 202 Freeway. The article questioned the reasons for this change or shift in support. I would propose that there are two reasons: there is more vocalization of past objections, and residents are looking at the data and questioning the motive and analysis for persisting with the original freeway alignment. Specifically, lack of support is based on the following observations:

Residents have begun to scrutinize the data that ADOT has providing to the community. In the last six months citizens have begun to look closer at some of the information that was previously released and is currently being presented. One of the first reports, "The Purpose and Need Memorandum," was presented to the Ahwatukee Foothills Planning Committee and members of the community at a Freeway Citizens Public Meeting held at Desert Vista over two years ago. It was received with skepticism then and continues to be questioned now.

What many of us recognize is there is a disconnect between the data in the "Purpose and Needs Memorandum" and the justification for this freeway. The report shows that the biggest growth areas occur primarily in the Northwest Valley (Surprise, Peoria), West Valley (Buckeye, Goodyear, Avondale) and the Northeast Valley (Carefree, North Phoenix, Scottsdale). The primary growth in the region for the next 20 years is not in Ahwatukee or Chandler or even the Southeast Valley (Future Growth Areas, city of Phoenix). It is in the Northern, Northwest and West Valley.

The ADOT Historical and Projected Population Growth Distribution Map shows no significant growth projected for Ahwatukee or Chandler in the next 20 years. It is very clear that the North and West Valley desperately need better access to I-10, and no one will deny that these transportation and growth issues need to be handled but they should be handled, separately (perhaps by the cities of the West Valley) and should not be tied to the traffic woes of the Southeast Valley.

Ahwatukee residents have reviewed the data which shows us the analysis preformed to justify the freeway. This information is on the ADOT South Mountain Freeway Web site (www.southmountainfreeway.com) and it causes us to question the benefit of this proposed freeway to the Southeast Valley. The Purpose and Needs Draft Report states that building the South Mountain 202 will only lessen commute time from I-10/Pecos to Washington by two minutes. Not building it will increase the travel time by seven minutes.

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These paltry changes do not entice Southeast Valley residents to support a freeway that will have such a devastating impact on our environment, quality of life and local traffic patterns. For residents who believed that construction of this freeway was the only chance for alleviating traffic on the Broadway curve, we now know this is not so. In fact, the Ahwatukee Village Planning Committee has been appraised of two other I-10 improvements programs that will provide better relief for ALL East Valley drivers who attempt to drive to downtown Phoenix.

The widening of I-10 and the construction of a number of "frontage/access" roads adjacent to I-10 will detangle the lane switching that occurs at the Broadway curve/U.S.60/S.R.143 interchange. These improvements that ADOT has not publicized have much more potential to improve traffic flow than the "around the mountain/Loop 202" could ever provide. Many members of the public still are unaware of these proposed improvements, after all they have not been on a "plan" for 20 years.

Once residents began to educate themselves and become knowledgeable of all data and issues surrounding this project, support for the freeway has shifted. All of this information (or lack thereof) causes many residents to question what kind of positive impact the proposed freeway will have on travel times and traffic loads.

Much of the data sited in the Purpose and Needs Draft Report, as well as data presented at the Grace Inn public meeting, is two to four years old already. In fact numerous requests for updated traffic projections and traffic operations data have yet to be presented to the Citizens Advisory Team. It is unreasonable to expect support for a project when timely and accurate data is absent, and when the justification for building this freeway is supported by outmoded data.

In addition, updated information about the type of traffic which will be shifted off of the 10-Broadway curve to the proposed Loop 202 (one of the touted benefits of constructing the proposed South Mountain Freeway) has also not been forthcoming to the CAT or the public, leaving us to surmise commercial truck traffic will be the only beneficiaries of this system.

This freeway is being sold to us as a "reliever," but let's call it what it is: a bypass for truck traffic. That is what it was originally called 20 years ago. We are not fooled by who will use this freeway.

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