

SOUTH MOUNTAIN FREEWAY (LOOP 202 EXTENSION)

Bad for Our Communities, Bad for Our Environment



The South Mountain Freeway is a proposed 22–24 mile, eight-lane freeway that would extend the southern portion of Loop 202 to connect with Interstate 10 west of Phoenix. The projected cost to build it is more than \$2 billion. The project has been under consideration for more than 25 years but was stalled due to lack of support and funding. Planning is now moving forward, and a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) was recently released.

As proposed, the project would cut through the western portion of South Mountain Park, encourage long commutes, and

exacerbate urban sprawl. Furthermore, the project would destroy wildlife and habitat, increase local air pollution, and disrupt sacred places.

There are many issues connected to the construction of new highways and roads – increased crime, low land values, more pressure on law enforcement, etc. The following is just a sampling of those that have a negative impact on the environment and communities.

Issues associated with construction of new highways:

- **Increased traffic and congestion:** Benefits of new highway construction are typically short lived. New freeways encourage additional vehicle use, and the new “uncongested” areas are soon just as congested as other roads in the area. This congestion further exacerbates air quality issues, resulting in more pollution spread out over a larger area.

Additionally, these new roadways promote suburban sprawl. The new access to areas previously undeveloped results in new housing, shopping, and business centers, and people must drive longer distances to reach their homes, schools, or work, creating more traffic and congestion. Sprawl also affects our standard of living by making car ownership mandatory. Without efficient transportation options, it becomes critical to own a car in order to participate in our society. Funding highway projects disproportionately with other transportation options severely limits our choices.

- **Diminishing air quality and increased potential for health problems and environmental degradation:** More vehicles travelling more miles equal more pollution. This is a problem for public health as well as environmental health. The Phoenix area already suffers significantly from poor air quality, much of it related to vehicles. Pollution from vehicles also contributes significantly to climate change.

- **Increased dependence on fossil fuels and energy waste:** An increase in the daily vehicle miles traveled further increases our dependence on foreign fuel sources and puts even more strain on the natural resources of our own country.
- **Burden on the local tax base:** Construction and maintenance of highways and the development associated with them increases our tax burden. When a new residential or commercial development is built outside of an existing community, roads, sewer systems, and water lines have to be built to service the urban sprawl. In most cases, neither the developers nor the new residents pay their full, fair share – it is the rest of the community that makes up the difference. In most urban areas, the middle class and poor bear a disproportionate share of this burden. Additionally, most new, sprawling development costs more to build and service than the taxes or fees it generates.
- **Destruction of habitat and dissection of wildlife corridors:** Roads have been identified as a major threat to the persistence of many wildlife populations. They result in increased mortality, habitat loss and degradation, reduced access to vital resources, and division of populations. The proposed South Mountain Freeway will not only destroy habitat and result in direct mortality of some wildlife, but it will also bisect an important corridor that allows movement between South Mountain Park and the Sierra Estrellas Mountains, as well as to other areas.
- **Inefficient use of valuable land:** Smart growth ideas are based on the ability to use land efficiently and for the greater good of the surrounding communities. It enables us to preserve open space and habitat while also making it easier for residents to live and work, thus enhancing quality of life. The amount of valuable space used up by the construction of freeways further hinders the ability of smart growth plans to be implemented and maintained successfully.

Alternatives to the Proposed Freeway Include:

- Increase funding for clean public transportation options such as fuel-efficient buses and rail projects.
- Encourage Transit-Oriented Development to integrate public transit, land use (residential, commercial, industrial, open-space), and the environment.
- Encourage innovative, incentive-based programs that encourage walking, biking, carpooling, or the use of public transportation.
- Authorize zoning decisions that encourage mixed-use development.

The public will be able to provide comments in a variety of ways during the 90-day public comment period, including attending a public hearing scheduled for 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. on May 21 at the Phoenix Convention Center and providing input by email at projects@azdot.gov, online at azdot.gov/SouthMountainFreeway, via phone at (602) 712-7006, or by mail to the South Mountain Study Team, 1655 W. Jackson St. MD 126F, Phoenix, AZ 85007.

To review and submit comments on the DEIS for the South Mountain Freeway, please visit <http://www.azdot.gov/SouthMountainFreeway>.

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