

N. Valley could get easier route to interstates

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A new 14-mile stretch of the Loop 303 would give north and Northwest Valley drivers easier access between Interstate 10 and Interstate 17 as early as 2012.

Many of the residents who attended a public meeting this week at Sandra Day O'Connor High School in north Phoenix were excited about the new route, but a few were not so pleased about living adjacent to the freeway.

Details of the final design for the \$311 million plan were unveiled at the public meeting. Nearly 50 people turned out to listen to a presentation of the two-part plan.

Construction of the first part, or interim plan, will begin as early as 2009, extending the northeasternmost section of Loop 303 from Happy Valley Parkway to I-17 via a four-lane, divided freeway. It will be the final leg of the road, allowing uninterrupted travel on Loop 303 between I-10 in Goodyear and I-17 in far north Phoenix.

"Drivers will be able to go from I-17 to the I-10 on the Loop 303," said Tim Tait, community relations director for the Arizona Department of Transportation. "And that's a big achievement."

Though parts of Loop 303 in the West Valley are now an undivided roadway, plans call for the eventual widening of the entire route into full freeway.

The latest plans were presented through a PowerPoint presentation, with additional maps and displays and project designers on hand to answer questions.

Brian Bielick, 32, of northwest Phoenix, was excited about the proposal.

"I think it's great. I think it's going in at the right time to keep traffic moving," said Bielick. "If you look up, there is not a lot of development now, but it's coming and so we need a lot of roads to move traffic."

The final part of the plan will include a six-lane divided freeway. The completion of the Loop 303 is one element of the Regional Transportation Plan, a comprehensive program of voter-approved transportation improvements through 2025.