

## **AZ 347 widening gets full funding** *Voters to decide fate of state transportation plan in November*

By ADAM GAUB, Managing Editor

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**TUCSON - Less than a month after the first draft of the statewide 30-year transportation project list was issued by the TIME Coalition, Maricopa has gone from being left out in the cold to fully funded for a widening project on Arizona 347.**



Adam Gaub/Maricopa Monitor, Maricopa Mayor Anthony Smith thanks the State Transportation Board in Tucson, June 19, for the re-inclusion of Maricopa projects into the statewide plan.

At a special public hearing in Tucson Thursday morning, the State Transportation Board voted unanimously to approve the revised list of projects for the state that now included nearly \$208 million to add two additional lanes to Arizona 347 north of Maricopa, and \$35 million for an overpass on Arizona 347 at the Union Pacific Railroad crossing.

Other major projects in Pinal County include the widening of Interstate 10 from Riggs Road to Interstate 8 and the construction of a new north-south freeway near Arizona 87. A plan for a public-private partnership project on the Val Vista road corridor - south of the Ak-Chin community in Maricopa's planning area - also made the final cut.

"This is a great day for Maricopa," Councilmember Edward Farrell said.

Mayor Anthony Smith thanked ADOT and the TIME Coalition for reconsidering the projects vital to Maricopa's present and future.

"These projects increase the circulation, reduce congestion and improve safety for residents," Smith said.

The projects are part of an overall list of \$42.5 billion worth of transportation needs that would be paid for by a one-cent sales tax. That measure, however, which is backed by Gov. Janet Napolitano, requires the approval of voters in November.

While initially on the table for much of the yearlong discussion on the critical transportation needs around the state, the Maricopa projects did not make the first report released by TIME in May.

Working behind the scenes, however, were Maricopa Development Services Director Brent Billingsley, Farrell and new mayor Smith, stressing the need for having those projects included.

Even with the backing of the Pinal County Alliance, represented Thursday by Vice Chair and Casa Grande Mayor Bob Jackson, and the County Board of Supervisors, represented by Chairman and District 3 representative David Snider, the negotiations with the Arizona Department of Transportation were laborious.

Maricopa was first awarded Monday, June 16, when the Arizona 347 widening project was brought back into the mix. At that point, however, the funding level for the project was only conceded at \$35 million - a level that would have required additional alternative funding sources, such as creating the new lanes as toll lanes.

By the Thursday meeting, ADOT Director Victor Mendez and the TIME Coalition had agreed to fund the widening project in full, while also dedicating the \$35 million - a portion of what will be needed - for the railroad crossing.

The "million-dollar question," according to Farrell, is now finding out when the projects can begin, if the voters approve the sales tax increase in November.

While the sales tax bump wouldn't kick in until January 2010, successful passage of the proposal would allow ADOT to bond against those future revenues and start some projects sooner, Mendez said.

Not all were happy with the project list, as Tucson resident William Gardner said the state would have been better served by a plan that would focus primarily on light rail in Phoenix and Tucson, and high-speed commuter rail between the two large metropolitan areas.

While the State Transportation Board will have one last chance to review the plan before its' implementation, the key is the voter-approval, and with the current downturn in the economy, not all were optimistic of the passage of such a plan.

"The whole state has got to get behind this," former Florence Mayor Tom Rankin said. "I'm not so sure it's going to pass."

TIME Coalition Treasurer Marty Shultz said it would be an aggressive campaign during the summer and fall to get citizens onboard.

"This is the mark of something that is going to change for the better Arizona's economy and how people work and live," he said. "We will put the pedal to the medal... educating the public on how integral this plan is."

State transportation plan Pinal County funding breakdown

Highway Projects:

\$2.2 billion

- Widen I-10 to six lanes from Riggs Road to I-8: \$500M.
- Widen SR 77 to six lanes from county line to Oracle Junction: \$70M.
- Widen SR 347 to 6 lanes from Maricopa to I-10: \$208M
- Fund construction of UPRR overpass at SR 347: \$35M
- Widen US 60 to four lanes from SR 79 to Globe: \$300M.

- New roadway SR 802 from the county line to North-South corridor: \$328M.
- Public-Private Partnerships: Val Vista Freeway from north-south corridor to SR 303L: \$228.5M. Pinal north-South corridor from US 60 to I-10: \$360M.

Public transit projects:

\$1.69 billion

- Connecting Communities bus transit plan: \$20M.
- Enhancement programs: \$43.6M.
- Transit for elderly, disabled and rural populations: \$12.4M.
- Statewide vanpool and rideshare programs: \$17.5M.
- Transit and rail marketing and related programs: \$1.4M.
- High speed urban-urban rail connections: \$1.6M.

Local mobility programs: \$336K

Environmental

enhancements: \$71K

Source: TIME Coalition, approved final draft, state transportation plan

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