

May 14, 2007

Dale Buskirk
Transportation Planning Director
ADOT
206 S 17th Ave, MD 310B
Phoenix, AZ 85007

Dear Mr. Buskirk:

Attached to this letter is a position paper that reflects the views of a large group of San Pedro Valley residents who have met over the last two weeks to discuss the proposed Tucson-Phoenix Bypass, part of which would be alongside the San Pedro River.

Our group feels that constructing a major highway through the San Pedro River Valley should not be undertaken for a variety of reasons. It is simply a bad idea.

We respectfully submit for consideration the issues in the attached paper together with a number of questions to which we would like answers should the Arizona Department of Transportation recommend proceeding with this project.

Sincerely

Robert M. McClure
Maria Troutner

for
The Cascabel Working Group,
Benson, Arizona

Position statement from residents of the Middle San Pedro River Valley

This statement reflects the position of a large group of San Pedro Valley residents who first met on May 8 to discuss the proposed Tucson-Phoenix I10 Bypass, part of which would be alongside the San Pedro River. As a group we take no position on whether a Bypass around Tucson and/or Phoenix is needed or economic. However, after looking at the route of the proposed highway as published in the Tucson newspaper, all of those present at that and subsequent meetings agreed that building such a bypass in the San Pedro Valley is simply ill advised. There are several reasons.

First, the San Pedro Valley topography and geology is not very conducive to highway construction. The San Pedro River valley is narrow and consists of fragile and unstable alluvial cliffs, hills, washes, and bends. It is also home to an active, shifting and highly unpredictable river that swells as many times its normal size during monsoons. Because of these issues, the cost to the taxpayers to build the proposed highway in this valley would be several times the cost per mile of a highway built on flatter and more hospitable terrain.

Second, much of the San Pedro Valley is protected by conservation projects that residents have put in place with grants and assistance from agencies, institutions and organizations such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, The Audubon Society, the Bureau of Land Management, the Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, the Cascabel Hermitage Association, and the Salt River Project, to name only a few.

These agencies have funded the many conservation projects because they recognized the amazing wildlife that thrives in this valley and appreciated the need to afford it special protection. As we are sure you know, the San Pedro Valley is home to several endangered and/or threatened species of animals, birds and plants, both at the federal and state level. This is well documented. Also, the San Pedro River is a major bird migratory route in North America, without which many species of birds would soon become endangered or even extinct. From an environmental point of view, the San Pedro Valley is an astonishing jewel that is unique, precious and should be left in its almost pristine state for the environmental welfare of Arizona and for future generations.

A third important consideration against this project is the impact it would have on the archaeological record of the San Pedro Valley. More than 400 archaeological sites have been documented in this portion of the valley, some of which are already under the protection of various agencies and preservation organizations, such as the Center for Desert Archaeology. The present day road through the valley follows the historic Leach Wagon Road, and evidence of early homesteads can still be found alongside it.

A fourth issue is that it would promote urban sprawl. Where goes a highway, so goes development. Where this occurs, governments are compelled to spend additional sums on infrastructure, and this is often not considered in the basic cost of highway construction. Sprawl also encourages long distance commuting and thus exacerbates an already critical energy situation.

Questions for the Arizona Department of Transportation concerning an I10 bypass through the San Pedro River Valley

1. What weight will be given to pollution issues: water, noise, air quality, light?
2. Is encroachment on wildlife habitat a major concern in highway planning?
3. Will a representative from Arizona Game and Fish participate in evaluating the impact of this project on not only currently endangered and/or threatened species but also those that might in the future become endangered and/or threatened?
4. Will a representative from the US Fish and Wildlife participate as well?
5. What methodology will be used to evaluate the benefit to having trucks and other traffic bypass Tucson and Phoenix?
6. What methodology will be used to estimate how much traffic will be drawn to such a bypass?
7. Is ADOT required to evaluate the impact of the bypass on the counties through which it passes with respect to the additional infrastructure that these counties might have to provide?
8. Will ADOT consider the impact of the bypass on property taxation in the counties affected?
9. How will such a highway impact the San Pedro watershed?
10. Does ADOT have a charter to consider the impact of the loss of a unique environment on future generations?
11. Is there a comprehensive transportation plan for Arizona?
12. If there is a comprehensive plan, how does this bypass fit into that plan?
13. Does such a plan contemplate major projects in non-highway transportation? (eg Rapid transit, railroad)
14. What routes other than the one through the San Pedro River Valley are also being considered?
15. Is the alternative of simply widening I10 being considered?
16. Is providing alternative routes for local commuter traffic in Tucson and/or Phoenix being considered as a way of relieving congestion on I10?
17. Will ADOT consider the impact on future traffic of significantly increased gasoline and diesel prices?
18. Is the quality of life of the current residents of the valley something that ADOT will consider?
19. Will the potential for future eco-tourism in the San Pedro River Valley be estimated?
20. And lastly, will there be an estimate for the cost of legal defense to the challenges that are likely to be mounted?