

Councilman: Put Loop 202 on reservation

By Cathryn Creno

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Phoenix City Councilman Sal DiCiccio and members of an Ahwatukee Foothills residents' committee say they have studied state and county plans to link Chandler and west Phoenix with a 22-mile freeway and come to a conclusion:

Put the South Mountain Freeway on the Gila River Reservation.

The Gila River Tribal Council in the past decade has passed two resolutions against having the extension of Loop 202 on tribal land.

The committee, formed by DiCiccio, expects to finalize its plan today and forward the request in writing to the state's freeway-planning agencies.

City officials are not formally involved in the decision about the freeway alignment. But early balloting for the District 6 Phoenix City Council runoff starts this week and whether Ahwatukee will get the freeway has become a campaign issue for DiCiccio, who faces a challenger for his seat.

Later this month, the Maricopa County Association of Governments Regional Council is expected to vote on a plan to build the South Mountain Freeway along Pecos

through South Mountain Park. The \$1.9 billion project is part of the Valley-wide Loop 202.

It would connect Interstate 10 and Pecos Road in Chandler to I-10 and 59th Avenue in west Phoenix.

Arizona Department of Transportation maps since the 1980s have shown a future freeway along Pecos, one of Phoenix's southernmost streets.

DiCiccio said Monday that neither ADOT nor MAG has formally asked Gila River officials if they would consider a freeway deal.

"I'm telling you, when the public finds out about what has not happened, people are going to be outraged," DiCiccio said.

"We need to give the Gilas a real proposal that has real teeth in it. A proposal with a timeline. That would be the respectful thing to do."

Alia Maisonet, a Gila River Indian Community spokeswoman, confirmed

that neither state nor county officials have presented a formal proposal to put Loop 202 on tribal land. But she said the tribal council has twice considered the matter internally and twice voted against it, although she noted that the council could change its mind.

"Things can change," she said.

But ADOT spokesman Timothy Tait said he was baffled by DiCiccio's implication that Gila River officials have been left out

of freeway negotiations.

"They (Gila River officials) attend MAG meetings and have been part of the process all along," he said. "We have not approached them because they have passed resolutions against the freeway."

Meanwhile, MAG's transportation director, Eric Anderson, said he was sympathetic with Ahwatukee residents who don't want to live next to a freeway. But he said the plans have been on maps

for decades, nearly all the land needed has been acquired and it would be prohibitively costly to change direction now.

"ADOT has already acquired about 90 percent of the land it needs for the (South Mountain Freeway) right-of-way," Anderson said.

"Even if something

happened and the Gila Community suddenly changed its mind, the cost would be huge. We could be talking another half billion dollars. Even if we had another half billion dollars to spend on transportation in the Valley, there are other projects out there we would need the money for."