

ADOT Study Aims To Find Ways To Service Phenomenal Growth

By Tammy Gray-Searles

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Holbrook also faces an increasing problem with trains blocking the single downtown crossing. As ship-ping increases, so will the number of trains traveling through town each day. Currently, a train passes through town and temporarily blocks the crossing an average of once every 15 minutes. As most residents are well aware, the real problems occur when a train blocks the intersection for an extended period of time while changing tracks. Not only does this delay commerce and create frustration, it also leaves a portion of the city cut off from emergency services. The traffic congestion caused by trains also presents a problem for emergency vehicles. Recently, an ambulance with its lights and sirens on became trapped in the long line of vehicles waiting to cross the tracks. Although the ambulance was eventually able to make its way around the traffic, it was delayed in reaching its destination. Solving these types of transportation problems is the focus of a regional framework study by the Ari-zona Department of Transportation (ADOT). The first step in the study was a series of workshops to solicit input and learn what is needed in each community. Workshops were held in Show Low, Flagstaff and Win-dow Rock, with the meeting in Window Rock to include discussion on transportation in and around Hol-brook. Armed with the information about each community's unique transportation problems and concerns, officials will creat a plan to address anticipated needs for the next 42 years. The framework process is a unique and unprecedented way of looking at transportation planning; an ADOT fact sheet on the study notes. It is unique in the following aspects: * The framework process is looking farther into the future than we ever have looked before. We are looking out to 2050. Most planning timeframes are only about 20 years out. * Most planning processes are cost constrained, meaning that they look at the dollars available to spend and then try to fit transportation improvements within those dollars. This process is not cost con-strained. We want a true look at what we really need for the future. * This statewide process is unprecedented in the United States because we are looking at transportation in the context of community and economic development. This is important to you at the local level because it is an opportunity to look ahead at community and economic development patterns, and the desires of local and regional communities in terms of growth and development, and make smart choices about our future. * The regional framework studies will be compiled in early 2009 into a statewide planning framework that truly reflects the desires and growth trends at the local level. Although ADOT is seeking local input, the closest community meeting for the Holbrook area was held in Window Rock. The community meeting for the Snowflake and Taylor area was held in Show Low. ADOT has divided Northern Arizona into three sections for the purpose of the study, the Coconino-Yavapai focus area, the Mogollon Rim focus area and the Navajo-Hopi focus area. Holbrook is included in the Navajo-Hopi focus area, which starts at the county line just west of Win-slow and includes all of Interstate 40 to the New Mexico border, and runs north-south from the Utah state border to the Highway 77 and State Route 377 interchange just south of town. Snowflake and Taylor, as well as St. Johns, Show Low, Payson and Pine, are included in the Mogollon Rim focus area, and the Coconino-Yavapai focus area is one of the largest, including all roads from the Utah state line almost to Cordes Junction, and from just west of Winslow to just east of Peach Springs. In order to create the plan, ADOT officials note that they are seeking to answer four fundamental questions. The questions are, What part can transportation play in encouraging quality economic growth? How can we improve the links and relationship between land use and transportation to achieve responsible urban growth patterns following the principles of

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smart growth and sustainability? How can we improve links between population centers, which will strengthen the base for economic growth? How can transportation decisions enhance our quality of life and improve our natural environment in a way that is fair and equitable for Arizonans? For towns like Snowflake and Taylor it could mean addressing existing points of congestion, as well as future traffic flow problems that will be created by the area's housing boom. The amount of traffic on State Route 77 near Snowflake Junior High School, for instance, increased rapidly between 2003 and 2005. According to ADOT estimates, in 2003 there was an average of 9,600 vehicles per day, and by 2005 that average was 14,400. ADOT has since changed its calculation method, which generally resulted in lower estimations, and in 2006 estimated that there was an average of 13,200 vehicles per day on the same stretch of road. Regardless of the method of calculation, the estimates show that the amount of traffic in and around Snowflake and Taylor has greatly increased in the last five years. Rapid growth in places like California, Utah and Las Vegas, Nev., is expected to have an impact on future transportation needs, even in rural Northeastern Arizona. ADOT already recognizes that additional lanes on SR 77 between Holbrook and Snowflake are needed, and as part of the framework study they are looking at growth patterns in neighboring states to try to determine how they might affect Arizona's transportation needs. Highway intersections in Holbrook and in Show Low have been identified as future "chokepoints," or points of congestion. The burgeoning high tech corridor along Interstate 25 in New Mexico is expected to affect traffic flow in Northern Arizona. Within Arizona, the projected doubling of the population of Phoenix, Prescott and Tucson is expected to create what ADOT has termed a "Sun Corridor Megapolitan Area." While meeting the transportation needs of this expected megalopolis is a challenge in its own right, the framework study is designed to also plan for the effect that growth will have on the rest of Arizona's transportation systems. Among some of the suggested solutions is a proposal to extend Interstate 17 all the way to the Utah border in hopes of relieving some of the burden on Interstate 40. The extension would create a tourism and recreation corridor that would allow travelers coming from the Phoenix area to continue north without using I-40 to connect to another highway. It may also relieve I-40 of some of the heavy freight traffic headed in and out of rapidly growing areas of Utah. Short-term solutions already being proposed include restricting freight traffic to the right lane and 55 miles per hour, constructing hill climb lanes and creating railroad grade separations to help eliminate problems like those that are occurring at Holbrook's crossing. Long-term solutions will be proposed after the study is complete. Even though the study is not being restricted to what the state already knows it can and can't afford, ADOT is already looking at potential ways to fund the future projects. The list of currently available revenue sources includes gas tax, vehicle license tax, regional area road funds, roadway impact fees, local sales tax, construction sales tax and secondary property taxes. The list of potential revenue sources includes local options to levy fuel taxes, other local options for taxes or fees, additional regional sales tax, regional or state impact fees, primary property taxes and charges based on roadway use. A second series of community workshops to help complete the information gathering phase will be scheduled late this summer. The dates and locations of the workshops have not yet been announced.