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## Maricopa Community

### City trio turn around transportation future

Adam Gaub, Managing Editor

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**For a city known to some as the state's biggest cul-de-sac (quickly surpassing Ahwatukee in infamy), it's never a good thing when the city's key transportation guy has a "deer in the headlights" look when talking about the city's main artery.**

But for Maricopa, that was just the case, as Development Services Director Brent Billingsley went before the outgoing City Council on May 20, telling them the dire news that Maricopa's two major projects on Arizona 347 were late-second scratches from a statewide 30-year transportation plan.

Rather than waiting for the train to leave the station without Maricopa onboard, Billingsley enlisted the help of the already engaged Councilmember Edward Farrell and new Mayor Anthony Smith to plead Maricopa's case to the State Transportation Board and Department of Transportation Director Victor Mendez.

The result? \$243 million dedicated to widening Arizona 347 north of the city to six lanes and building an overpass over the soon-to-be-double-tracked Union Pacific Railroad crossing. Now all it takes is the voter approval of the one-cent sales tax in November to foot the bill for the \$42.5 billion statewide plan.

No small feat considering the TIME Coalition's initial final report, issued in May, wouldn't have given a dime to anything 347-related. Even when initial negotiations with the state had them giving a portion of the funds needed and recommending toll lanes be used to pay for the expansion, Maricopa's leaders kept pushing.

Not taking his eye off the ball, Farrell said that the city could now focus on funding solutions for widening and expanding 347 south of the city to Interstate 8. Such a road is being considered now during the Hidden Valley Framework Study - the plan that could outline and identify even more future transportation projects for the city.

The Hidden Valley Study takes into account what city leaders know too well - planning for new routes through Gila River land is an arrogant and ultimately wasteful expenditure of time.

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Not to say the tribe would never allow new roads - they have long since looked at commercial expansion on their land and have asked ADOT to consider adding interchanges along I-10 - but tribal leadership changes hands often and plans can change overnight.

With that in mind, and a state route that is already reaching capacity in some spots, the city knew its' future was in peril if funding for 347 went by the wayside. It would not have been simply new residents that would have stopped flooding this city, but potential industry and commercial developments may have looked elsewhere without a widened main route into town.

And while there is still plenty more work to be done, Billingsley, Smith and Farrell made sure that while Maricopa may be on an island, that the state did not leave it deserted.

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