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## Maricopa Community

### Transportation plan "light years ahead," says director

By ADAM GAUB, Managing Editor

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The slowdown in the housing market has allowed the city to retool for future planning, and perhaps nowhere else has that been made more clear than in the recently completed and council-adopted **Regional transportation Update.**



Submitted Image, The city's Regional Transportation Plan Update calls for a loop parkway system by the 2030 population threshold, seen above.

Prepared by consultant Wilson and Company, the study was approved unanimously by the Maricopa City Council on Sept. 16. While the plan update does not build any roads on its own, it will have a lasting impact on the future transportation planning for the city and all of Western Pinal County, said Brent Billingsley, the city's director of development services.

"We did not want to be bridled by any limitations when we did this study," Billingsley said, comparing the update to the limited scope of the already outdated Small Area Transportation Study conducted with state assistance in





2005. "This was the Ferrari of transportation studies for a city our size. It is light years ahead."

Billingsley said the study was significant on several levels, but primarily because it looked beyond the city to include the entire general planning area and because it did not place the city's eggs in the basket on relying on Pinal County or the Arizona Department of Transportation to do projects for the city.

"We're trying to control our own destiny. We want to plan improvements both inter- and intra-regionally without precluding other roads that could benefit our community.

"It is doing responsible planning for the city that is also considering the needs of the region as a whole."

After seeing the statewide TIME Coalition-backed transportation plan fail to make the November ballot and with the full knowledge that not a single state transportation project in the Maricopa area is on the books for at least the next five years, the desire to plan something that could be paid for locally was paramount.

The study looked at a number of different options for internal and regional circulation, concluding that a loop system would serve Maricopa best. Unlike the Phoenix metropolitan area which has seen the loop system primarily carried out by freeways, Maricopa would instead rely on widening and improving existing roads in the future to the new Arizona parkway design.

Modeled after the Michigan parkways that serve as a low-cost alternative to freeways, Billingsley said the parkway system was key to Maricopa being able to pay for the improvements in infrastructure into the future.

"If we do things based on the thresholds, we can afford to build the infrastructure... assuming new developers continue to provide the infrastructure necessary with their projects."

Billingsley said the regional Transportation Plan Update projects for both 2020 and 2030 but said those dates aren't as important as the thresholds they set. The study sets forth guidelines not only for what types of roads and intersections are needed where, but based on growth, when.

"Safety and mobility projects are our first priority, then those that provide connectivity," he said, adding that the plan has shown the department was on track with their project requests for the city's Capital Improvement Plan earlier this year.

The study also recommends the use of technological advances in the industry, such as variable message boards, and freeway management systems that can raise the carrying capacity of a highway, such as Arizona 347.

Dan Marum, the Wilson and Company project manager for the plan update, told the City Council on Sept. 16 that the city would be able to keep pace with growth through the use of the plan.

"We believe there's a combination of arterials and parkways that can be used to keep pace with growth in the community," he said.

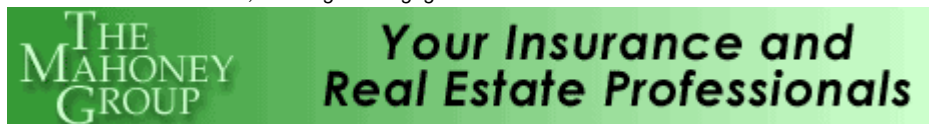
Mayor Anthony Smith was pleased not only that the plan was put in place, but that projections indicated funding would make the building of these future improvements more than wishful thinking.

"I'm glad to see some type of solution for our interior roads is possible," he said.

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