



News

ADOT asking public for input on state plan

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Published: Tuesday, November 11, 2008 5:48 PM CST

The Arizona Department of Transportation is inviting Cochise County residents to help shape the future of transportation in Arizona by participating in a community workshop in Sierra Vista on Tuesday, Nov. 18.

The workshop will be held twice that day at the Windemere Hotel, 2047 S. Highway 92. The first session will run from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. and the second session from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m.

ADOT began the Statewide Transportation Planning Study in early 2008 to focus on a long-range vision of transportation needs in Arizona.

Bill Harmon, ADOT's District Supervisor in Safford, made a presentation recently to the Willcox City Council.

He invited council members and interested members of the public to attend the upcoming workshops.

This study is also known as "Building a Quality Arizona" and "looks at the long term - 50 years," Harmon said.

He talked about ADOT's commitment to Arizona during his power point presentation.

"We understand that transportation is personal and important to quality of life," said Harmon, adding that ADOT's 4,500 professionals live and work here, too.

"Our job is to serve you with an excellent transportation system," he said. "We are committed to providing leadership for a comprehensive and cohesive statewide network that will help you get around more easily."

"We know that decisions we make now have impact far into the future; we care about the legacy we will leave for future generations."

How far into the future? The study focuses on the year 2050.

Harmon explained what it means, "to build a quality Arizona."

"We look at actual needs, not just what we think we can afford -- traditional planning is fiscally constrained."

He said that ADOT considers "the relationships between land use, economic vitality, and transportation;" and works "with our partners and the public around the state for a collaborative vision that reflects our values as Arizonans. "

"We think carefully about what type of lifestyle we want to create and what kind of legacy we want to leave for future generations."

Harmon then addressed the state's "transportation reality."

Construction costs are up 60-percent over the last five years in Arizona and the cost of fuel are increasing dramatically, Harmon said.

In addition, federal and state fuel tax value is steadily eroding and federal transportation funding is expiring, he said.

"We are looking at ADOT's only being able to do maintenance outside Maricopa and Pima (County) areas," he said.

"No longer will we be able to build bridges such as the 340 interchange here in Willcox."

Talking about the state's potential for growth, Harmon said, "Arizona will continue to grow and so will its need for transportation."

With the population of Arizona's growth areas at 5.1 million in 2005, "the 2050 projection estimate is 14.1 million people in our state," he said.

Another point Harmon made is that a large amount of imports from major California ports pass through Arizona to the rest of the United States, with Interstates 8, 10, and 40 handling the heavy truck traffic.

The study is composed of four Regional Framework Studies: Northern, Western, Central and Eastern Arizona, he said.

Each Regional Framework Study looks at ways to plan for growth, understand community development and economic patterns, and be prepared for future transportation needs.

Harmon gave an overview of the process, which is to gather from the community issues and ideas; develop criteria to compare scenarios based on the values expressed; present scenarios to the public and ask for feedback (mid-November); and merge feedback into one overall recommendation.

Smart Growth Planning Principles have to be considered and will be discussed in the community workshops, he said.

These principles are:

- Mix land uses
- Take advantage of existing community assets
- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Promote distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Strengthen and encourage growth in existing communities
- Foster walk able neighborhoods
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty, and critical environmental areas
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Make development decisions consistent, socially equitable, and cost-effective
- Encourage citizen and stakeholder participation in development decisions

Harmon said that we are in a critical point in the process.

"Come and review the ideas that we have developed and give us your thoughts," he said.

"Participation is crucial at the open houses as we think about our future," Harmon said. "Arizona is in a defining moment for transportation; we have the ability now to design our future together. This is the time to get involved."

For more information, visit www.bqaz.gov.

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