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AZ transport plans addressed

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On Wednesday, Nov. 12, a community workshop that allowed Flagstaff residents to see potential plans for improved state transportation systems was held in the High Country Conference Center.

The event, which was sponsored by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), consisted of two sets of workshops held throughout the course of the day. These workshops served to forecast potential problems Arizona's transportation system could face within the next 50 years before providing differing solutions.

Brent Cain, an employee of HDR Engineering, said action must be taken in light of the expected changes Arizona will soon see take effect.

"No action is not really an alternative," Cain said. "With anticipated growth, (we want) to provide another way to get from north to south."

Cain said by the year 2050, if no changes are made to the current transportation system, it would take roughly six hours to get from Flagstaff to Phoenix. Other problems addressed included the addition of lanes to public highways to make drives shorter and safer, the need for wider bike paths to avoid accidents with cars and new passing lanes to increase safety when passing on the highway.

As a result of these issues, ADOT began working with a program called Building a Quality Arizona (BQAZ). The two organizations began working with one another in 2007, when many of the potential problems were quickly identified.

In March 2008, ADOT held its first series of community workshops in order to make the potential problems public. At the first workshop, they hoped citizens would provide insight and help guide the project in a way that would be universally accepted.

"We're here to listen to your input so we can get this out there," Cain said at the second series of workshops, held on Nov. 12. "We want to work with you."

Using the information gathered at the March workshops, three scenarios were developed by ADOT and BQAZ in order to address the needs deemed most important. These scenarios were finally made public at the Nov. 12 workshops.

The scenarios make predictions concerning the future of transportation, estimating the norm for transportation in 2050.

These plans include the assumption that personal vehicles will be a prominent form of transportation, that the popularity of public transit will grow and that densification of urban societies will lead to an increase in unified transportation.

From here, solutions were created for each of the three scenarios, in order to offer a wide array of possibilities.

James Zumpf, a member of ADOT, said all three scenarios were based on logical conceptions that arose from research done by ADOT.

“We are making some assumptions (that are) all conceptual,” Zumpf said. “We need to start planning (for) anticipated changes.”

The first of these, titled Scenario A, assumes that the majority of people will use their own vehicles. As a result, this scenario would see numerous lanes added to interstate highways. This is expected to widen traffic flow in light of a growing population.

“(We are) looking at the bigger picture,” Cain said. “Put the right lane in the right place and the infrastructure will follow.”

The second scenario, Scenario B, sees a shift from personal vehicles to public transit, walking and biking as means for transportation. This scenario also sees a widening of interstate highways, including I-17. Other improvements include the introduction of a rail track connecting cities throughout Arizona.

The final scenario, Scenario C, justifies the densification of urban societies. Cain said Scenario C will limit personal vehicles, primarily due to “the heavy emphasis on transit.”

Cited as a mix between Scenarios A and B, Scenario C will attempt to make public transit more accessible by focusing on growth.

“Scenario C is great in urban areas,” Cain said. “You’re not going to need a vehicle to drive.”

Despite the solutions planned for these potential problems, Cain said it is hard to predict where the world will be in 50 years. While all three scenarios are unique, Cain said the future lies with the evolution of people and technology.

Heather Honsberger, a consultant for HDR Engineering, said with improvements of technology, anything concerning the future of the transportation system is possible.

“See where we’ve come the last 50 years,” Honsberger said. “Think about the next 50 years — the sky is the limit.”