ADOT sees multi-modal transit in Arizona's future

BY WILLIAM ROLLER, SUN STAFF WRITER
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The Arizona Department of Transportation is gathering a consensus in various communities to shape the future of transportation around the state and visited Yuma Wednesday for local input.

In a series of 25 workshops divided among four state regions that included two visits each in the western district of Bullhead City, Lake Havasu City and Yuma, ADOT is looking for visionary ideas of how they want to move about in the future, noted Lucy Shipp, ADOT spokeswoman.

At the newly constructed riverfront conference center at Pivot Point, a turnout of 40 for an afternoon workshop titled "Building a Quality Arizona," civic and business leaders along with residents seemed to agree that mass transit seems to be to way to go but they also realized residents were not going to give up their cars, Shipp said.

She went on that population and employment growth are the driving forces behind a demand for new roads and transit services. Arizona has a current population of about six million that is projected to grow to 15 million by 2050. To keep up with the needs, ADOT is focusing on a series of framework studies to plan for growth while keeping in mind each community's development and economic pattern.

Despite the volatility in gasoline prices, whether $2 or $4 a gallon, congestion on all of Yuma's roadways year-round is a major concern when considering the right path to follow in developing transportation choices, said Scott Omer, PB Americas senior project manager.

PB is a full-service engineering firm that is a consultant to ADOT. Omer helped facilitate the workshop that outlined three possible scenarios for the future.

In 2005, a motorist could get from Flagstaff to almost anywhere in the state with five hours driving, Omer pointed out. Yet by 2050, a motorist would take five hours driving from Yuma to Gila Bend when it only takes two hours now, he said. In order to avoid traffic gridlock, the state must plan ahead.

In Plan A or the personal mobility scenario, residents will continue to use personal automobiles as a primary mode of transportation but new technology will offer more fuel-efficient vehicles along with hybrid cars, and designated high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on freeways. Some roadways will be widened and others added to accommodate new technology transit.

In Plan B or the shared mobility scenario, the shift will focus toward mass transit of buses, rail and bicycling not as recreation but to reach a destination. But this will more likely be adopted by that generation's grandchildren than the present one.

In Plan C or the smart growth scenario, much of the focus is on self-sustained communities where work, school, shopping and recreation are all available where a resident lives. This kind of community will avoid "leap frog" development, that is, unplanned or development

that does not fit within community designs, Omer noted.

At a series of four breakout sessions, attendees suggested what future transportation ideas might work in Yuma. Although many liked the idea of electric cars, they probably would not work in Yuma because they only have a 40-mile range before needing a recharge. Yet many favored widening the major freeways - I-8, I-10 - and U.S. 95 to four or five lanes and, along with HOV lanes, include fuel-efficient vehicle lanes.

Other ideas embraced cluster housing with multiple stories and avoiding building developments in outlying areas just because land is cheap and expect infrastructure to accommodate development after it's built. Bullet trains from San Diego to Yuma and continuing to Phoenix were also suggested. And light rail lines from San Luis to Tacna or up to Quartzsite were favored.

Shipp added that the YCAT bus system has been a huge success and should be expanded to more routes and greater frequency, but the funding is not available presently. She noted Arizona's ability to stay competitive and improve the quality of life depends upon local communities collaborating for a smarter transportation system of the future.

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