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ADOT reps present three scenarios for transportation in the year 2050

By: Sean Dieterich , The Independent

SHOW LOW - Faced with a growing population and a transportation network that will need to keep up, the Arizona Department of Transportation held a meeting Nov. 13 to ask area residents for their ideas on how to best face the challenge.

The meeting was held at JB's Restaurant with a morning and an evening session. Representatives from ADOT were on hand to present audience members with scenarios designed to improve the state's transportation network, as well as hear feedback from those in attendance.

Laurel Parker, management coordinator and consultant for ADOT, said the state's transportation needs will increase as the state's population does the same. And with construction costs up and transportation revenue down, Arizona faces a significant challenge.

"We've got some real changing times," she said.

Parker said the state's current transportation network "will not meet the needs of the future." With that in mind, ADOT's statewide framework study, called "Building a Quality Arizona," looks to identify the state's needs for 2050, when Arizona's population is expected to be more than double from today.

Parker said the White Mountains are no exception. While most of the state's traffic congestion is located in Phoenix and Tucson, she said that could spread to the rest of the state by 2050 if the state's roadway system was not updated.

ADOT's framework studies began in March and April with community workshops across four geographical regions, two interstate areas and Maricopa and Pima counties. The White Mountains fall within the Eastern Arizona region, in the Mogollon Rim focus area.

From the meetings, ADOT had developed three different scenarios that broadly outlined a transportation plan for the future. She said they were not going to fund any particular scenario immediately. ADOT Liaison James Lump added they were looking for the high points and low points of each given the study area.

"Which projects are needed from each scenario?" he asked. "We're trying to say, 'What best fits this area?'"

Aaron Iverson, a tech consultant from URS Engineering out of San Francisco, Calif., said there were some assumptions to take in with all three scenarios. Each scenario includes different levels of multi-modal transportation options, addresses sustainable or smart growth principles and builds on the current transportation system. Each scenario is independent of each other.

Scenario A addresses personal vehicle mobility. Assuming low energy prices and new technology, Iverson said they would invest in roadways, widening state highways and improving safety and access.

"It's all about improving the roadway system, adding more capacity," he said.

Some of the roadways that could be improved include State Route 260 from Show Low to Star Valley, Show Low to Pinetop-Lakeside and Pinetop-Lakeside to Springerville, U.S. 60 from Show Low to Springerville and Interstate 40.

Scenario B addresses transit mobility, assuming it becomes too expensive to drive personal vehicles and people turn to mass transit. The scenario would focus more on transit projects, like bus services, and encourages use of walking and bicycling for regular daily trips. Scenario B suggests enhancing bus service in Payson, Show Low, Snowflake-Taylor and other local areas, as well as improving U.S. 60 from Show Low to Globe.

Scenario C is called the focused growth scenario. Under it, some elements of scenarios A and B would be combined, with an emphasis on local travel and adding bicycle and pedestrian projects. As a whole, the scenario would shift the focus from personal vehicles to transportation improvements.

ADOT asked those in attendance, about 20 people, to look over the scenarios and provide comments. Show Low resident Marc Ridenour said he believed Scenario B would be best for localized areas, while Scenario C would be better for heavily populated areas like Phoenix and Tucson. He said he was in favor of seeing more bike lanes and expanded sidewalks, particularly on White Mountain Road.

"We need a safe way for people to ride their bicycles," he said.

St. Johns resident Tom Hansen said he also would like to see more bicycle lanes on roads that could support them.

"Wherever there is a 10-mile stretch, it's bikeable," he said.

Jana Szoke of the Northern Arizona Council of Governments said she would like to see a transit system, especially for the elderly so they can easily pick up groceries and prescriptions. Lump said ADOT has funds called "5310 funds" that focus on projects to benefit the elderly, such as Dial-a-Ride, that can be applied for.

Bob Saner, Show Low Planning and Zoning commissioner, said he would like to see a public road that would connect the west side of the White Mountains, Heber/Overgaard, with the east side, Springerville.

"None of the three scenarios address drive-through traffic through the state," he said.

Saner added he would like to see improvements to U.S. 60 to help out truck traffic, especially when inclement weather

makes roads hard to travel.

"When bad weather hits this portion of the state, truckers want to get out of here," he said.

Ridenour said a long-term approach was good, but ADOT's look at the year 2050 might be too long term. He said it may be more prudent to look at improvements needed for 10 years down the road.

"It might be better to limit our attempts to forecast," he said. "Therefore, if things change in a way we don't anticipate, we're not stuck."

ADOT plans to look at all the comments offered and include that information in an overall state plan. Parker said ADOT would come back next spring and bring forth preliminary recommendations.

To see the four active studies in ADOT's Building a Quality Arizona study, visit www.bqaz.gov.

* Reach the reporter at seand@wmicentral.com

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