

ADOT needs to broaden its concept of transportation

GUEST COMMENTARY

Roughly six years ago, a locally based Federal Highway Administration official assured me (verbally, of course) that ADOT would be required to accommodate the bicycling community (transportation-oriented and recreational/fitness) if/when the 202 "Pecos" freeway was built going around South Mountain to the west. The "accommodation" requested was/is a road or pathway to connect to 51st Avenue from the western edge of the Ahwatukee Foothills.

Initially, ADOT was gathering related input from bicyclists. But, somewhere along the way, the "accommodation" seems to have evaporated. Possibly, it coincided with the inability to achieve an alignment that didn't require costly blasting through two ridges at the west end of South Mountain. So, within a \$1.75 billion project with four freeway lanes in each direction (really?), cost savings need to come from NOT providing for any means

for bicyclists, pedestrians or any other non-vehicular mode users to be able to cover roughly four miles (or less) between the western edge of the Ahwatukee Foothills and 51st Avenue.



Bob Beane

As it stands today, no accommodation is planned that I know of or can discern from publicly released plans. There are no connecting frontage roads, and there are no plans for a bike path in the right of way (as have been built in places such as Colo-

rado or Utah).

However, a concerned group of bicycling advocates and some community leaders from Phoenix, Chandler and Tempe are seeking to at least get ADOT to design in enough space within the right of way to allow a bike path to be constructed. I can't speak for everyone in the group, but the consensus seems to be that having this connectivity in place would be an equitable and extremely positive non-vehicular transportation connection and recreational amenity that would enhance the neighboring communities.

Setting aside the issue of whether this freeway project is truly needed, it seems to many that ADOT still stands for "Arizona Department of Trucks (and Cars)" and that ADOT remains miles away from being a true transportation department that has a broader vision of its role and potential in contributing a multi-modal environment to the communities in which it op-

erates. ADOT leadership, to date, seems to lack any vision of contributing to the overall health and community environment in a way that other DOTs have embraced for years.

A fraction of a fraction of the cost of this massive project could not only allocate space within the design, but fund a bike path for at least four miles, or so. But, that's, sadly, not in the plans...yet. As I mentioned, there is a significant constituency that is asking for ADOT to incorporate non-vehicular connectivity into the 202 freeway plans. We are hopeful that ADOT can take a significant community-oriented step forward by approaching this request with a "how can we help make this happen" attitude, rather than the perceived car-centric, liability and cost-based blinders that seem to have guided past decision-making.

• Ahwatukee resident Bob Beane is president of the Coalition of Arizona Bicyclists.