

Stalled

Funding to widen our stretch of I-17 isn't scheduled until 2020. The project could see funds sooner, but competition for that money is stiff. **By Rebecca I. Allen**

I-17 drivers stuck in traffic can blame lack of funds, poor planning, shortages of cement, Pulte for building Anthem (which sold 10 years ahead of schedule) and a whole slew of other reasons for why they sit still on a two-lane highway instead of zipping along on three or more lanes like other major thoroughfares in the Valley.

The most widely used north-south transit in the state hasn't been widened since it was built in the 50s and 60s. And it looks like the interstate might mark its 70th birthday before any more blacktop is laid north of Carefree Highway.

Maybe.

Last month the state legislature set aside \$345 million to speed up highway projects, which could include accelerating the widening of the I-17 north of Carefree Highway.

But the much needed improvement will compete with other county projects. The funds will be divided between



the state's counties based on population- which gives Maricopa about \$207 million. And the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) will decide which planned projects will get the cash and an early green light for construction.

Lack of Influence Unlike most municipalities, Anthem does not have a mayor to serve on the MAG regional council. The roughly 23,000 Anthemites in unincorporated Maricopa County must rely on its elected county supervisor and state legislators for a voice in the regional transportation planning arena.



**State Representative
Pamela Gorman (R-Anthem)**

"There may not be a mayor for Anthem, but there are mayors to the north and south," said Rep. Pamela Gorman, R-

Anthem. "They all are fighting for their own little freeways, but unless someone does something about I-17 no one can get to their little freeways."

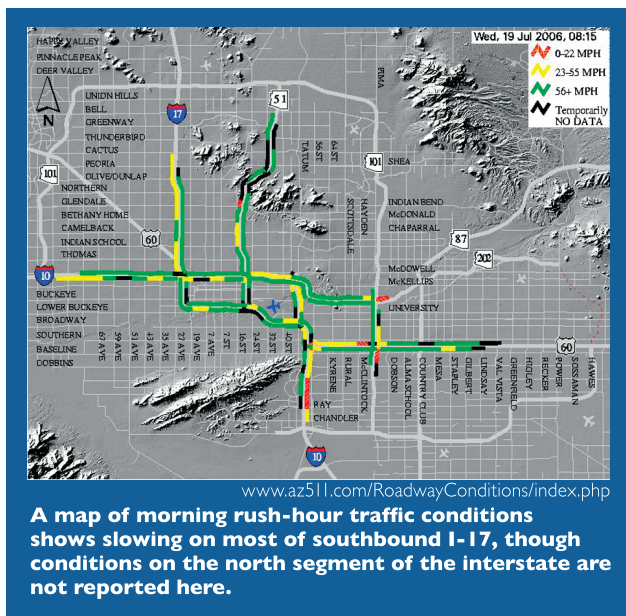
Formed in 1967, MAG provides regional planning and policy decisions in areas of transportation, air quality, water quality, regional development, and human services. MAG is separate entity from the Maricopa County government.

Addressing the Problems

Prior to the legislature allotting the \$345 million of surplus monies to the state's transportation needs,

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the Arizona Chamber of Commerce and Industry held the first of several transportation summits. The business community, elected officials from around the state and representatives from Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT), and Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) met June 14 to discuss the state's transportation issues. They plan to put together a detailed package to present to the state legislature this winter. Their goal is get all the stakeholders to agree on prioritizing highway projects and get more funding.

"It's about time we all got our heads out of the sand, or wherever else it might be buried," said Elliot Pollack, President of Elliott D. Pollack and Company, an economic and real estate consulting firm

in Scottsdale. "Even with in-fill and downtown development the bulk of growth is still going to be on the periphery...your bang for the buck is with freeways."

Several Problems The I-17 is just one of several problem areas.

"We're behind on our transportation, especially on our freeways, and we need to do whatever we can to catch up," said state Sen. Thayer Verschoor, R-Gilbert.

So while the mayors of Glendale, Peoria and Surprise angle for funds for the Loop 303 and Scottsdale representatives vie for a Loop 101 carpool lane, the southwest Valley mayors want funding for the I-10. Who will speak for the I-17 widening?

"We've talked with legislature about getting that money into the budget to widen the I-17," said Jim Bloom, chief of staff for Maricopa County Supervisor Andrew Kunasek. "There are two big concerns for the legislature and the county: the 10 west to L.A.... and the 17 above the Carefree [Highway]. Improving at least up to the New River interchange is a high priority for the legislature, whether it's a high priority for MAG—I don't know."

Blaming Anthem The voter-approved Maricopa County Regional Transportation Plan includes more than \$250 million to improve I-17 north of Loop 101. Construction on widening I-17 with a third lane and a carpool lane on the 9-mile stretch from the Loop 101 to Carefree Highway should begin next year and be complete by 2010.

Widening north of Carefree Highway to Anthem Way is not funded until 2020. Many point the finger at Anthem when naming a traffic culprit.

ADOT Director Victor Mendez called it "the Anthem factor," when referring to periphery growth that exceeds expectations. "We need to be better able to work with major stakeholders and private companies before those plans

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—Jim Bloom, chief of staff for Maricopa County Supervisors

go into effect,” he told summit attendees June 14th.

Anthem will have 12,000 homes and an estimated 36,000 residents at build-out, which according to Jacques Petroulakis, director of public affairs for Pulte Homes and the Communities of Del Webb in Arizona, will occur in Parkside next year and Country Club this summer—nine years ahead of schedule.

“The reason it’s (I-17) so low on ADOT’s priority list is Anthem was not supposed to be this big so soon,” Bloom said. “The growth way outpaced everything.”

Which is nothing new,

according to Pollack.

“People say ‘I’ve heard growth is slowing,’” he said. “Well it’s not. And there’s not a real reason to believe it will. People have constantly under-predicted population.”

Woes Extend to Flagstaff

Until I-17 is widened, it’s only going to cause more woes for Anthem and all points north. Weekend Valley travelers are abandoning their summer homes in Flagstaff and cancelling trips to Sedona because they sit in traffic for hours every Friday on the only interstate that will get them there.

A representative from the Flagstaff Chamber

of Commerce told the transportation summit attendees that Valley residents were selling their second homes in the area because they could no longer count on a two-hour drive North, “but a four-to-five-hour marathon.”

“It’s a major economic environment problem for all of Maricopa County who get feeder people from the north,” Gorman said. “And the smaller communities to the North depend somewhat on people from Maricopa County to come up and spend their money on weekends and holidays.” **io**

Contact Rebecca Allen at Rebecca@ioanthem.com

Anthem Candidates Night

**Thursday, August 3rd, 6:00 p.m.
Anthem School, 41020 N. Freedom Way**

Avaluable opportunity to get to know your candidates and affect the future of your community. The moderator for the evening is Maria Baier, Former Executive Director of the

The Issues

- Completion of the frontage road between Daisy Mountain Drive and Carefree Highway
- Identifying funding for additional lanes on I-17 between Carefree Highway and New River Road
- Flexibility in legislation or initiative to preserve Daisy Mountain as open space
- Law enforcement
- Potential change in governance of Anthem
- Crime in schools and other school issues

Valley Partnership and former senior policy advisor on growth, the environment, and natural resource management in the Arizona Governor’s Office. Questions will be addressed by the candidates, time permitting. Send questions in advance to fgrimmelman@mindspring.com.

The Candidates

Governor

- Len Munsil (R)
- Governor Janet Napolitano (D) (not confirmed)

State Senate

- Ted Carpenter (R)
- Pamela Gorman (R)
- Jim Larson (D)

State Representative

- Arthur Boggs (D)
- Doug Clark (R)
- Sam Crump (R)

DVUSD School Board

- Christy Agosta