



Loop 202 cost cutting leaves some worried

By [Doug Murphy Ahwatukee Foothills News](#)

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A cost-cutting shift to the route of the South Mountain Loop 202 on the west side has residents in the Laveen and Estrella areas of Phoenix wondering how it will affect their homes and businesses.

Frank Fernandez is among those puzzled by the move that would push the route from 51st Avenue connecting with Interstate 10 farther west to 59th Avenue.

"I don't know what to think," he said as he looked at a map for the first time that showed the eight-lane freeway passing near his home south of I-10 and near 59th Avenue.

For years he had thought the freeway was going to be blocks away, only to be surprised by the new route at the public meeting last week at Sunridge Elementary School near 63rd Avenue and West Roosevelt Street. Now he's concerned that he'll have to drive out of his way each day just to get to and from his home if the freeway is built over 59th Avenue.

One business owner, who declined to speak on the record, was worried that the new route goes right through his business, and he's not sure how, or if, he can find a location to relocate to.

ADOT spokesman Tim Tait said the shift will help cut the cost of the freeway because fewer businesses will have to be relocated, compared to the previously approved 51st Avenue route, and because the state will have to buy less land.

"Being fiscally responsible is part of building a responsible project," Tait told a crowd Feb. 10 that saw the new route for the first time.

In Ahwatukee Foothills, freeway critics have been concerned that the cost savings, called "value engineering," simply means a way to build the freeway cheaply and with few amenities.

"This is the Wal-Mart of freeways," said Tim Lank, an Ahwatukee Foothills resident.

Originally designed in the mid-1980s, the freeway was quickly put on the back burner when funding ran dry.

Brought back to life in 2004, the freeway's cost quickly grew from around \$1 billion to \$2.5 billion.

By reducing the scale of the project, include reducing the size from 10 lanes to eight, which reduced the amount of land and homes that need to be purchased, and realigning the route to follow 59th Avenue in the west, the project has been scaled back to an estimated \$1.9 billion.

A draft Environmental Impact Statement is being finalized, and Tait said the construction schedule shows work beginning in 2015.

“That’s assuming things keep moving forward,” he reminded the audience.

One thing that could change the schedule is the Gila River Indian Community, which opposes any freeway either off the reservation and through ridges in South Mountain or on the reservation, appears to have accepted the inevitability of the freeway’s construction and has said that ADOT could look at potential routes on tribal land.

“It’s difficult to tell where that leads us,” Tait said.

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