

Policy Recommendations for bqAZ

In early 2009, PAG began working with the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan Task Force to identify projects and programs for ADOT's bqAZ plan. Instead of identifying projects for all three bqAZ scenarios, PAG's bqAZ Working Group chose to develop a single scenario, Scenario Pima, to provide their recommendations for bqAZ projects in Pima County. The projects recommendations can be found in the PAG region bqAZ map and accompanying GIS shape files.

During the Working Group meetings, the group consistently returned to certain issues and challenges that it deemed critical for ADOT to address in its long term planning process for Pima County. Many of these challenges centered on the enormous growth that is projected to occur throughout the Sun Corridor and the process that would be used to address the growth at the regional and state level.

PAG's bqAZ Working Group understands the need for more routes and connectivity between Pima and Pinal County and is aware that the roadway and transit improvements it recommended in Scenario Pima will not solve the traffic congestion projected for the Sun Corridor. In order to address the many unresolved planning issues between Pima, Pinal and Maricopa Counties, the Working Group stressed that interregional planning should be facilitated by ADOT so that the state can move beyond attempts to solve the major transportation challenges at the local level.

The following Policy Recommendations were developed by PAG's bqAZ Working Group.

1. **Pima / Pinal County Planning.** As the populations in Pinal and Pima Counties continue to grow, PAG recommends that ADOT facilitate coordinated planning efforts, not only between Pima and Pinal Counties, but also between Pima, Pinal and Maricopa Counties. These planning efforts should include discussions of roadways, transit, freight and passenger rail, land use and the effects of the infrastructure growth on environmentally sensitive lands.
2. **Addressing Projected Congestion along the Sun Corridor.** ADOT and their consultants have developed traffic projections for the Sun Corridor that show significant congestion on roadways within and between Pima, Maricopa and Pinal Counties. While the PAG 2040 Task Force acknowledges that further congestion relieving options are needed, it is clear that the major interregional transportation challenges that are evolving within the Sun Corridor cannot be solved at the local level or in a regionally focused and fiscally constrained planning effort such as the 2040 RTP. The Task Force recommends that ADOT join with PAG and the other MPO's in the Sun Corridor, MAG and CAAG, to initiate additional planning to actively address the projected congestion. This planning for the Sun Corridor should commence immediately and should consider a full range of congestion-relieving options, from technology and operational improvements to expansion of alternate modes as well as construction of additional interregional roadway arterials. An added planning focus should address how needed improvements could be developed in an environmentally sensitive manner.

It should be noted that Pinal County's bqAZ recommendations include a La Cholla Corridor extending from Tucson to Oracle Junction and a highway to connect with a potential I-10 bypass loop west of downtown Tucson, neither of which is included in Scenario Pima. Environmental and ecological impacts of the roadway projects along the proposed alignments need to be comprehensively analyzed and publicly reviewed prior to projecting the roadway for Pima County.

3. **Alternative Modes of Transportation.** While planning for road improvements, the PAG Working Group strongly encourages ADOT to include accommodations for bicycles and pedestrians on new roadways. The group also recommends that ADOT create user-friendly connections between alternative modes and roadways throughout Pima County to facilitate greater use of alternative modes in the region.
4. **Light Rail Transit and Commuter Rail Transit on Oracle Rd.** The Working Group identified light rail transit on Oracle Road between downtown and Tangerine Road as a regional priority to reduce local congestion along one of Tucson's major north-south corridors. In order to address some of the Pima/Pinal traffic congestion, the group also proposed commuter rail transit between Tucson and Florence. The commuter rail and light rail would share the same track and would allow long distance commuters to switch from one transit service to the other. In conjunction with the Tucson-Phoenix high speed rail line, the commuter rail and light rail transit would reduce vehicular traffic on I-10 and SR 79. Bus rapid transit is assumed to precede light rail transit and commuter rail transit within Pima County until construction of the rail lines is completed.
5. **High Capacity Transit Recommendations.** A High Capacity Transit (HCT) Plan has already been conducted for Pima County by Kittelson and Associates and the PAG Working Group strongly supports ADOT's participation in HCT recommendations for the region.
6. **Rail Planning.** The PAG region needs to be an active player in rail and air planning between Pima, Pinal and Maricopa Counties. The Working Group proposes at least three freight rail lines through the Tucson metropolitan area, with a potential fourth line. There would be the two current interstate freight lines, plus a new passenger rail line and a potential new Tucson-Phoenix freight line. The additional freight line could take some truck traffic off of I-10 and provide for faster freight movement between Tucson and Phoenix as well as within Pima County. ADOT should lead inter-regional discussions on future freight movements and continue conversations about high speed rail between Tucson and Phoenix.

The PAG bqAZ Working Group does not support the development of a freight line through Pima County along SR 85 to Lukeville. Such a rail line would affect environmentally sensitive lands in Organ Pipe National Monument and draw economic activity away from the county's primary economic generator, the Tucson region.

7. **Wildlife Crossings and Infrastructure.** Maintaining habitat connectivity for wildlife is critical to transportation planning in Pima County and the PAG Working Group asks that ADOT include wildlife crossing structures in the bqAZ plan. The wildlife crossings accommodate large mammals such as mule deer, bears, mountain lions, etc. as well as small mammals and facilitate linkages between protected wildlife areas such as the Tortolita and Santa Catalina Mountains. PAG can provide additional information and recommendations for crossing structure locations upon request; four wildlife crossing structure locations are shown on the bqAZ Scenario Pima map.