

Transportation and the Environment



Pima Association of Governments (PAG) is developing a new long-range transportation plan for eastern Pima County and the Tucson metropolitan area. PAG's 2040 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) will be a 30-year plan that provides a framework for transportation investments in the PAG region by identifying projects that could potentially be developed with federal, state and local funding through 2040.

How are transportation and the environment related?

The region's transportation infrastructure affects the region's environment in many ways, both directly and indirectly. About 60 percent of the air pollution in the Tucson region comes from motor vehicles while paved roads can increase stormwater runoff and flooding to negatively impact our water quality, safety and mobility. Wildlife and habitat are impacted through land consumption, habitat fragmentation and road kill. There are measures, however, that can be put into place to help alleviate the negative effects of transportation and maintain the health of the Sonoran Desert region.



Figure 1: Transportation planning and the environment are linked by government requirements for planning and decision-making processes.

How can transportation systems be sensitive to the environment?

There are several ways in which transportation planners can incorporate environmental elements into projects and policies. In fact, our region has incorporated mitigation strategies and conservation efforts into many of its transportation plans for decades. Pima County created guidelines for environmentally sensitive roadways which include standards for native plant use, salvaging materials and maintenance requirements. These guidelines include assessments of natural riparian areas in order to make better choices for roadway alignments that reduce impacts on the natural environment. The region also has committed to help wildlife cross major roadways through a regional funding program for wildlife linkages.

Creating an efficient and effective multi-modal transportation system also helps us preserve our natural environment. As a Gold-rated Bicycle Friendly Region with an extensive public transportation system, citizens can choose from a variety of modes for their mobility needs.



Wildlife Linkages

There are several ways that roads and traffic detrimentally impact wildlife populations: they increase mortality due to wildlife-vehicle collisions (road kill). They reduce the amount and quality of habitat, and in some instances, they prevent crossings altogether which leads to fragmentation of wildlife populations and available resources.

The region has responded to this threat on wildlife by including funding for wildlife linkages in the Regional Transportation Authority plan. Wildlife linkages use underpasses, overpasses or fences to assist wildlife in crossing roadways safely. Initial funding has been spent on studies to better understand the types of crossings and roads where linkages would be most effective in our region. In the future, more wildlife crossing projects will be implemented.

Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and the 2040 RTP

The Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) is a comprehensive planning initiative developed by Pima County to maintain or improve the region's critical ecosystems while accommodating future development and transportation needs. The plan directs growth toward areas with the least natural, historic and cultural resource values. The SDCP is not about whether Pima County continues to grow, it is about where the county will grow.

Federal law requires that long-range transportation plans coordinate with local conservation efforts and compare transportation plans to inventories of natural, cultural and historic resources. Potential projects in the 2040 RTP will be evaluated as to whether they correlate with the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan. The level-of-detail of the 2040 RTP will not be enough to determine exact project location and specific impacts. However, coordination between the RTP and SDCP should identify potential areas of conflict between future projects and conservation initiatives.

How will environmental concerns be addressed in the 2040 RTP?

Preserving our unique desert environment has been a goal of the region for a long time. Consequently, environmentally sensitive transportation solutions is one of the goals of the 2040 RTP. The RTP citizens' task force will develop transportation projects and policies that respond to this goal by looking at roadway projects, travel demand strategies and alternative modes of transportation, alternative fuels, wildlife linkages and other ideas to reduce pollution and preserve the natural environment while meeting future mobility needs.

For more information regarding transportation and the environment contact:

Ann Chanecka
Transportation Planner
(520) 792-1093
achanecka@pagnet.org

How can you stay informed or get involved?

To stay informed and get involved in PAG's 2040 RTP and/or other PAG planning activities:

- Visit the PAG Web site at www.pagnet.org
- Add your name to PAG's 2040 RTP mailing list by calling PAG at (520) 792-1093
- Schedule a speaker for your next meeting

