

RESOLUTION NO. 2021 - __

RESOLUTION OF THE PIMA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS IN OPPOSITION TO CONSTRUCTION OF THE WESTERN OPTION OF AN INTERSTATE 11 HIGHWAY PROPOSAL THAT BYPASSES TUCSON AND TRAVERSES PRISTINE AND INVALUABLE SONORAN DESERT AREAS

WHEREAS, Pima County in 2007 unanimously adopted a Resolution opposed to the construction of any highway that bypasses Tucson and traverses pristine and invaluable Sonoran Desert areas; and

WHEREAS, Pima County's national award winning landmark Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan and associated Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan identifies 44 rare local species of concern, whose areas of habitat and corridors between habitat areas are already under severe threat from development; and

WHEREAS, Pima County in 2017 adopted a Resolution to further Pima County's commitments to climate protection; and

WHEREAS, Pima County has established a Sustainability Program that recognizes the detriment of petroleum fueled car and truck travel because of their greenhouse gas and pollutant emissions, and therefore has caused the County to transition its fleet to use alternative fuels; and

WHEREAS, since 1974 Pima County has brought more than 98,000 acres of land and assumed grazing leases on more than 141,000 acres for open space and wildlife habitat preservation, and to mitigate impacts from development; and

WHEREAS, Pima County updated its Floodplain Management Ordinance in 2010 to avoid and minimize impacts to riparian vegetation along local washes; and

WHEREAS, Pima County adopted an updated county-wide Floodplain Management Plan in 2020 that creates a roadmap to guide the community through a number of steps to evaluate flood hazards, assess exposure to damage, and consider alternatives to address these issues; and

WHEREAS, Pima County is conducting the Brawley Wash Watershed Plan/Environmental Assessment (Plan/EA) to develop and study potential alternatives in creating a long-term plan to reduce flooding and erosion in the Brawley Wash watershed with a strong environmental resource focus; and

WHEREAS, the Federal Highway Administration and the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) have published the Interstate 11 Final Tier 1 Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Preliminary Section 4(f); and

WHEREAS, the EIS has advanced to the point of identifying two alternatives for the Preferred Alternative in Pima County; and

WHEREAS, the “West Option” Preferred Alternative through Avra Valley would degrade the Sonoran Desert, sever wildlife corridors identified by the ADOT sponsored “Arizona Wildlife Linkages Assessment,” impede washes and sheet-flooding flow ways, promote sprawl by opening new areas to intense residential and commercial development far from existing urban centers, thus encouraging more car and truck travel at a time when climate change and air pollution are growing concerns; and

WHEREAS, the Bureau of Reclamation’s Tucson Mitigation Corridor (TMC) is a wildlife mitigation property established in 1990 to provide for wildlife movement across the Central Arizona Project (CAP) aqueduct; and

WHEREAS, the Avra Valley alternative is not consistent with the TMC Cooperative Agreement and Master Management Plan and would defeat the initial purpose of the TMC’s acquisition as identified in 16 USC 663(d); and

WHEREAS, the West alternative through Avra Valley negatively impacts Tucson Mountain Park, Saguaro National Park, Ironwood Forest National Monument, Bureau of Reclamation’s Central Arizona Project Canal Mitigation Corridor, and important elements of the County’s Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan by slicing through sensitive areas, severing wildlife movement corridors and linkages between important habitat areas, and disturbing an unknown number of archaeological sites; and

WHEREAS, the cost of building a new highway would be enormous, requiring the acquisition of thousands of acres of new rights of way, expenditures of already high and rapidly increasing costs of concrete and asphalt, putting a tremendous burden on taxpayers and future highway users; and

WHEREAS, the production of the millions of tons of concrete and asphalt for this massive construction project would cause significant air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, as would the operation of heavy machinery in the construction process; and

WHEREAS, a new highway near or through Pima County on any new route, would promote urban sprawl, causing local governments to incur large financial responsibilities for new infrastructure costs, and force major changes to existing county land-use and zoning designations; and

WHEREAS, a new controlled access highway bypass would divert cars and trucks away from existing businesses that are dependent upon commerce generated from traffic on existing highways; and

WHEREAS, the State of Arizona could reduce highway traffic congestion, reduce the cost of highway maintenance, and save on the costs of rights of way purchases and concrete and asphalt production and installation – while reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions – by instead expanding capacity and developing multi-modal transportation facilities in existing transportation corridors to sustainably accommodate projected increases in freight while providing for much-needed passenger rail traffic.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Pima County Board of Supervisors:

Opposes the construction of the Preferred Alternative – West Option in Pima County that has the stated purpose of bypassing the existing Interstate 10 because ADOT erroneously believed that the environmental, historic, archaeological, and urban form impacts could not be adequately mitigated.

PASSED AND ADOPTED by the Board of Supervisors, Pima County, Arizona, this ____ day of August, 2021.

Sharon Bronson
Chair, Pima County Board of Supervisors

ATTEST:

Julie Castañeda
Clerk of the Board

APPROVED AS TO FORM:



Lesley M. Lukach
Deputy County Attorney