



# A budget for wildlife crossings

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**Coalition for  
Sonoran Desert  
Protection**



**Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan watchdog**

**Fight against Interstate 11 'West Option'**

**Designation of Ironwood National Monument**

**Open space protection and reconnection**

**Community science**

**Water resources protection**

**and much more!**

### **Our mission**

The Coalition for Sonoran Desert Protection **protects** the **biodiversity** of the Sonoran Desert in southern Arizona through science-informed advocacy, education, and collaboration.



**Coalition for  
Sonoran Desert  
Protection**



# Wildlife crossing basics

## Ecological connectivity

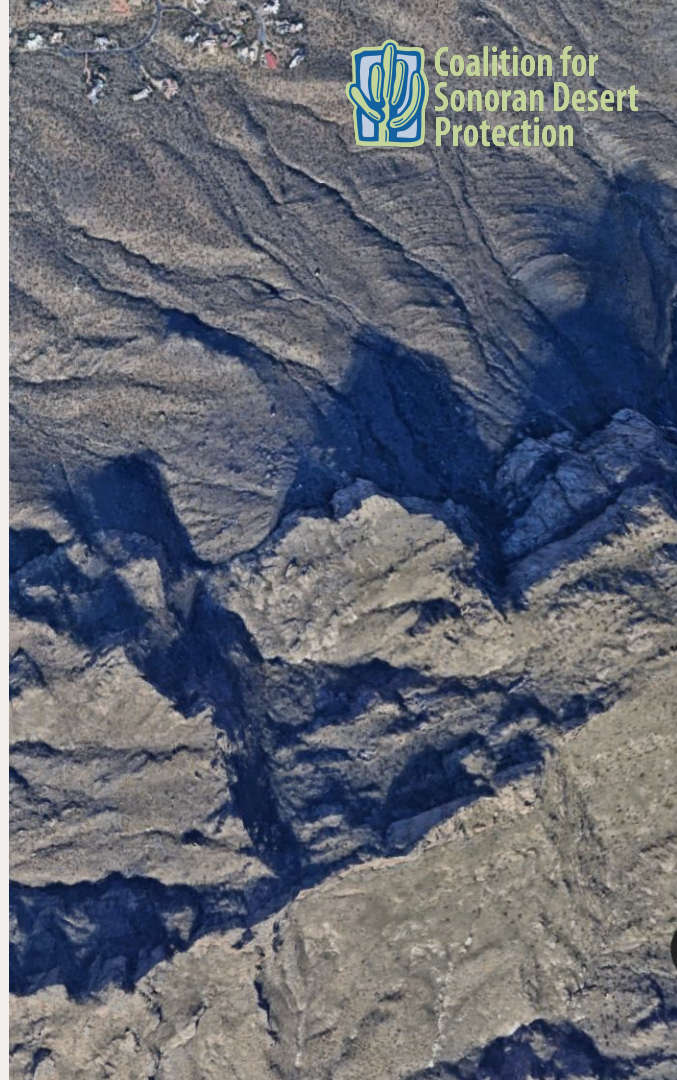
“the unimpeded movement of species, connection of habitats without hindrance, and the flow of natural processes that sustain life on Earth”

- *UN Convention on Migratory Species (CMS), 2024*



# Connectivity

- Ecological corridors connect protected areas, natural undisturbed open space and conservation-minded working landscapes for living species
- Helps with:
  - access to food and water
  - access to healthy habitats
  - genetic diversity
  - climate adaptation and resilience to change, fire and drought
  - pollination
  - movement of native seeds
  - soil health and erosion control
  - and so much more!

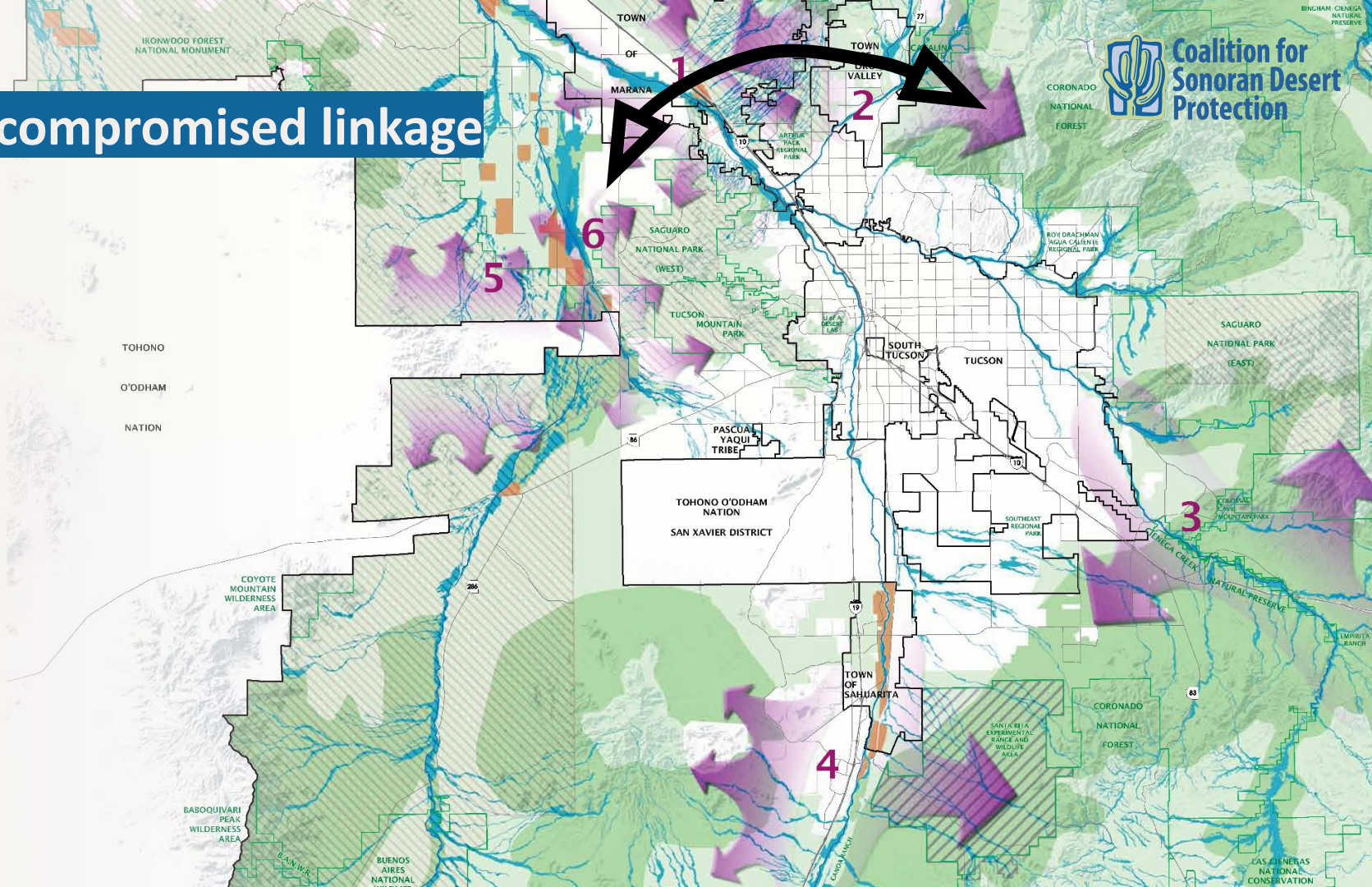


# Linear fragmentation: barriers to connectivity



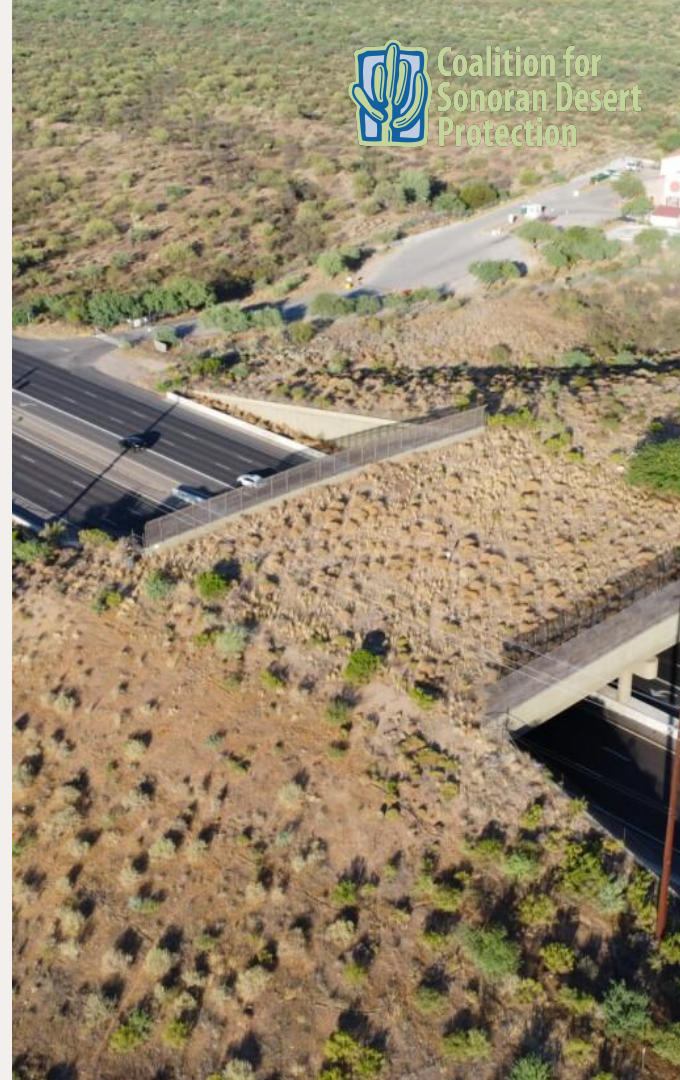


# Most compromised linkage



## N Oracle Rd crossings

- **The first wildlife bridge in the Sonoran Desert!**
- **One underpass + one overpass + funnel fencing**
- \$11.3MM from RTA budget
- Integrated into SR-77 road widening project
- Constructed by ADOT, completed in 2016
- 150 feet wide overpass: shields from sights, smells and sounds of road
- Optimal 'openness' for underpass (ratio: 0.96)
- AZGFD monitors the structures, CSDP monitors the habitat around them





**AREA UNDER  
SURVEILLANCE  
ÁREA BAJO VIGILANCIA**



**IMPORTANT WILDLIFE MOVEMENT AREA  
ÁREA DE MOVIMIENTO DE VIDA SILVESTRE IMPORTANTE**

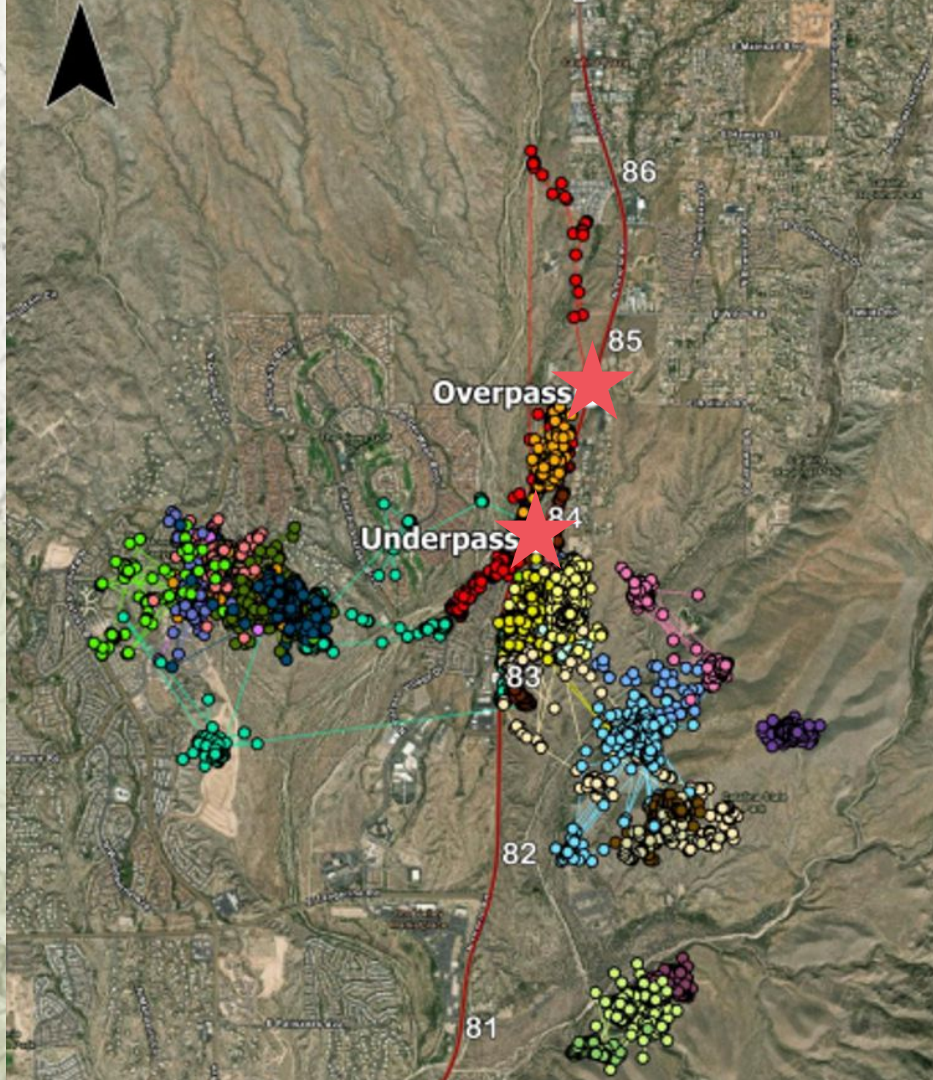
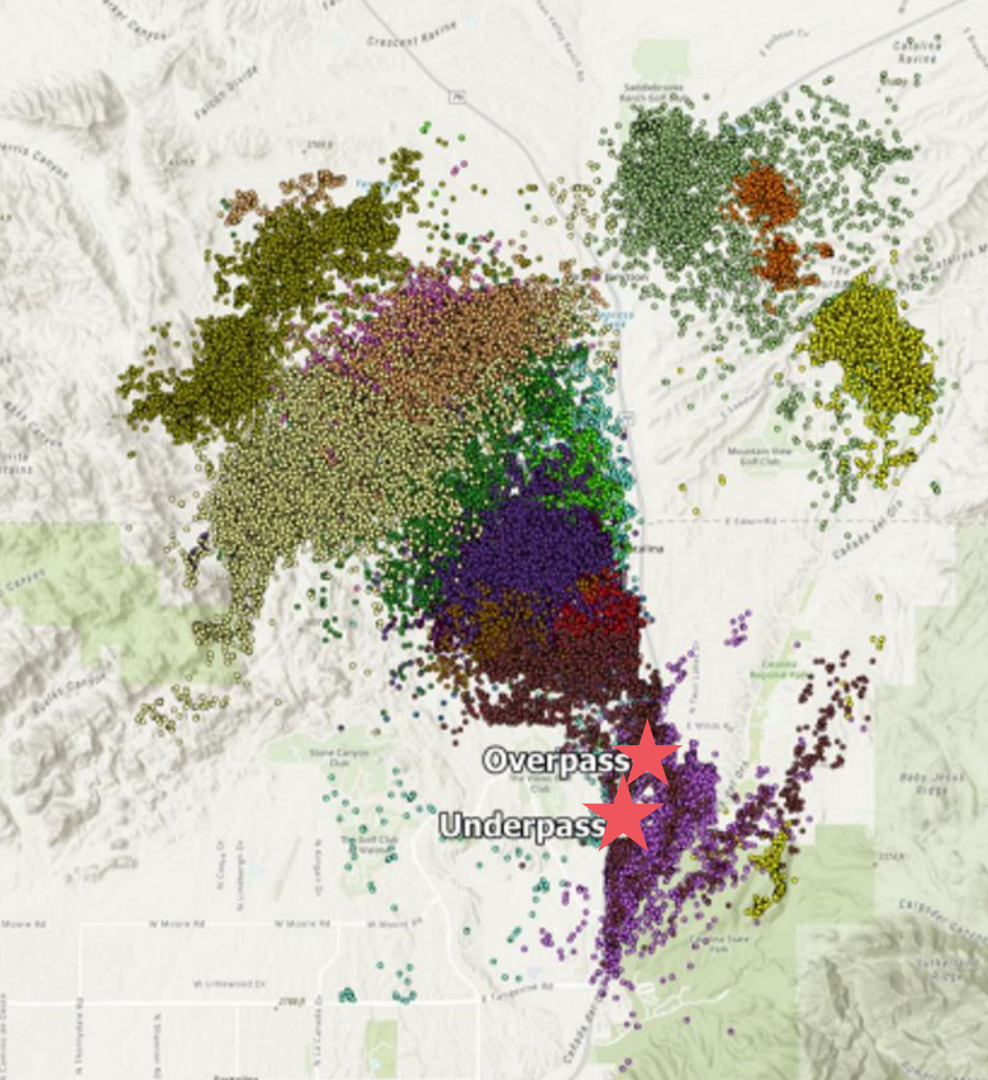
Your presence here is harmful to wildlife.  
Su presencia aquí es perjudicial para la  
vida silvestre.

[www.sonorandesert.org/wildlifecrossings](http://www.sonorandesert.org/wildlifecrossings)















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## Success stories!

- Popular before construction was even complete
- **More than 2,000 animal crossings / month!**
- Overpass: Mostly mule deer, but also many other species
- Underpass: Mostly javelina and coyote, but also many other species
- 24 species in the area, with highlights: white-nosed coati, mountain lion and black bear
- Evidence of more deer west of SR-77
- Working with local landowners: wildlife gate at Big Wash Overlook Place









**A budget for  
wildlife  
crossings: the  
role of the RTA**

# Regional Transportation Authority

- State law passed in 2004 creates the RTA, managed by Pima Association of Governments (PAG)
- Requires 9 regional jurisdictions to work cooperatively, removing veto power of Pima County and City of Tucson



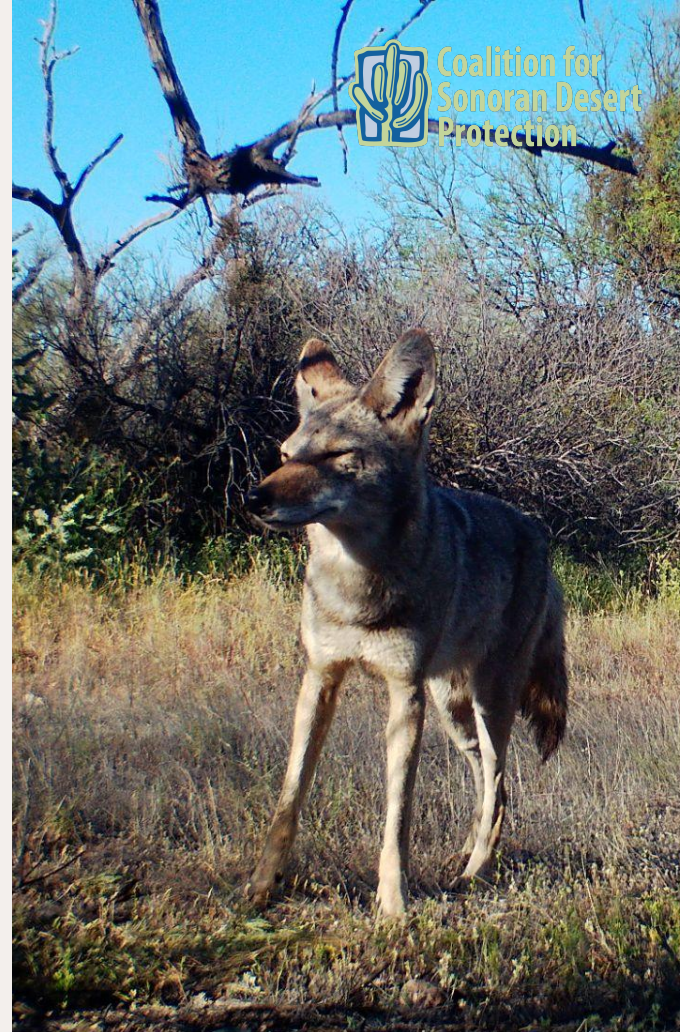
# RTA Plan

- 35-member Citizens' Advisory Committee helped develop plan over 10 months, starting in 2004
- Public outreach and education
- Final 20-year budget was \$2.1 billion, incl. **\$45 million for wildlife linkage projects**
- Revolutionary for its time
- Approved by voters in **2006** with 66% of vote
- **Funded by 1/2-cent sales tax over 20 years**



# Wildlife linkages in the Plan

- \$45 million over 20 years
- Wildlife Linkages Working Group reviewed funding proposals and guided disbursement
- **Ongoing challenge to convince RTA committees to approve**
- Only local jurisdictions and state agencies receive funding
- **Roadkill surveys guided crossing placement**
- Sonoran Desert culvert and fencing design
- Pre- and post-construction monitoring
- Pima County Wildlife Linkages Assessment



## RTA Plan work to date

- Road mortality surveys
- Bat houses in new bridges
- Retrofits of existing infrastructure
- Wildlife underpasses and bridges
  - **Twin Peaks Rd:** one underpass
  - **Tangerine Rd:** five underpasses
  - **State Route 77 (N Oracle Rd) Tortolita to Santa Catalina Mountains critical wildlife linkage:** one underpass, one bridge and funnel fencing
  - **State Route 86 Kitt Peak linkage:** two underpasses and 6 miles of funnel fencing
- Ongoing monitoring (incl. AZGFD camera traps)





Photo courtesy Tohono O'odham Nation

# Still left to do

## Current budget (RTA Plan)

- Twin Peaks, Tangerine Rd and Silverbell Rd wildlife underpasses
- Overpass(es) on SR-86

## Next budget (RTA Next)

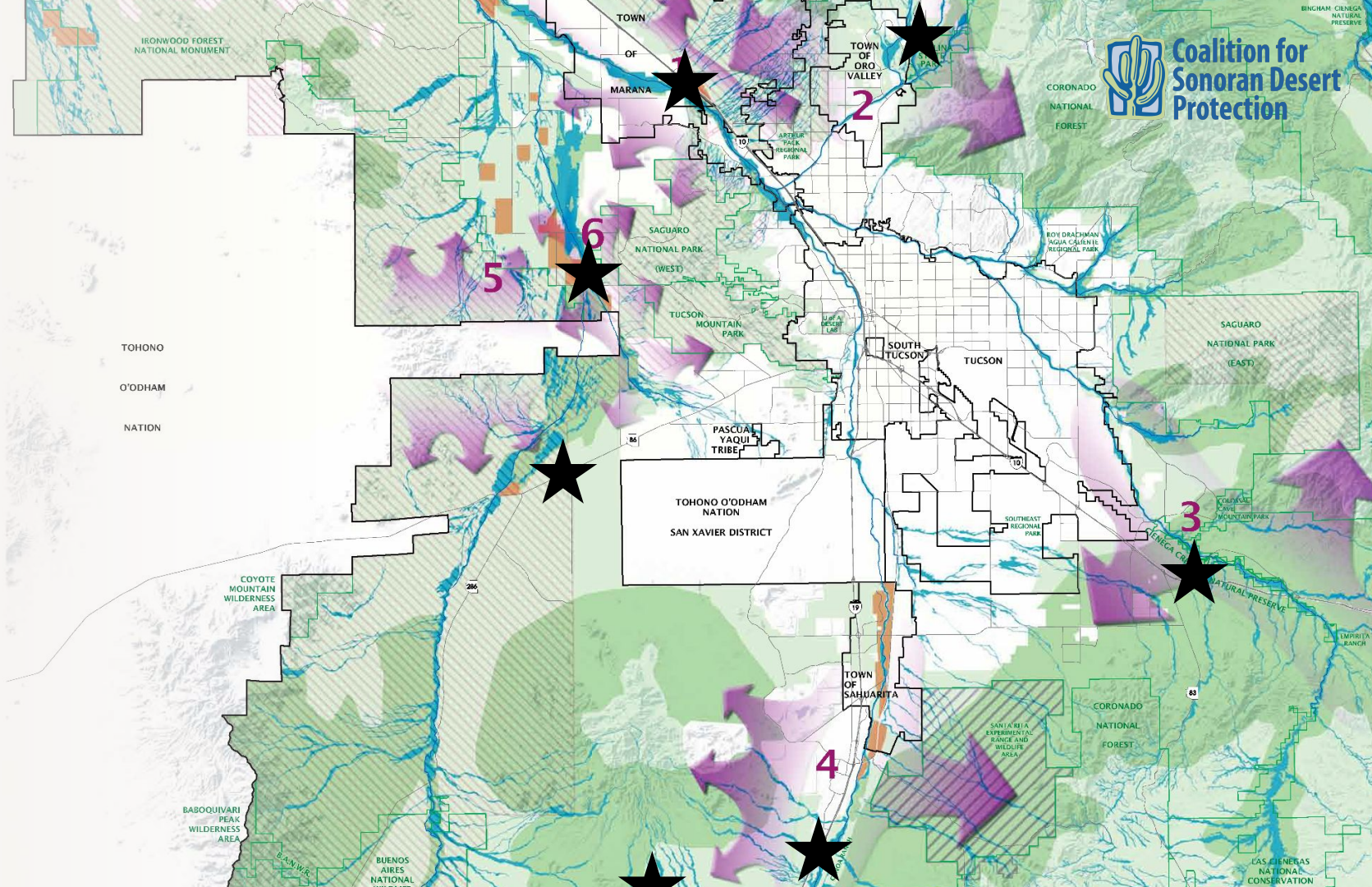
- Crossing structures for I-10 at Avra Valley Road - Tucson Mountains to Tortolita Mountains
- Crossing structures for I-19 - Santa Rita Mountains to Altar Valley and Baboquivari Mountains
- Many smaller projects



## In draft: RTA Next plan

- 20-year plan, also funded by 1/2 cent sales tax
- Originally included \$50MM in funding for wildlife linkages
- CSDP active on RTA Next Citizens Advisory Committee from 2018 to Nov 2023 (5.5 years!)
- Crossings budget reduced to \$25MM by RTA Board in Sep 2025 (only 55% of current budget!)
- Plan will likely go to vote in Nov 2025





TOHONO  
O'ODHAM  
NATION

IRONWOOD FOREST  
NATIONAL MONUMENT

TOWN  
OF

MARANA

TOWN  
OF  
ORIO  
VALLEY

CORONADO  
NATIONAL  
FOREST

ROY DRACHMAN  
AGUA CALIENTE  
REGIONAL PARK

SAGUARO  
NATIONAL PARK  
(WEST)

TUCSON  
MOUNTAIN  
PARK

SOUTH  
TUCSON

TUCSON

SAGUARO  
NATIONAL PARK  
(EAST)

PASCUA  
YAQUI  
TRIBE

TOHONO O'ODHAM  
NATION  
SAN XAVIER DISTRICT

SOUTHEAST  
REGIONAL PARK

COYOTE  
MOUNTAIN  
WILDERNESS  
AREA

BABOQUIVARI  
PEAK  
WILDERNESS  
AREA

BUENOS  
AIRES  
NATIONAL  
FOREST

TOWN  
OF  
SAHUARITA

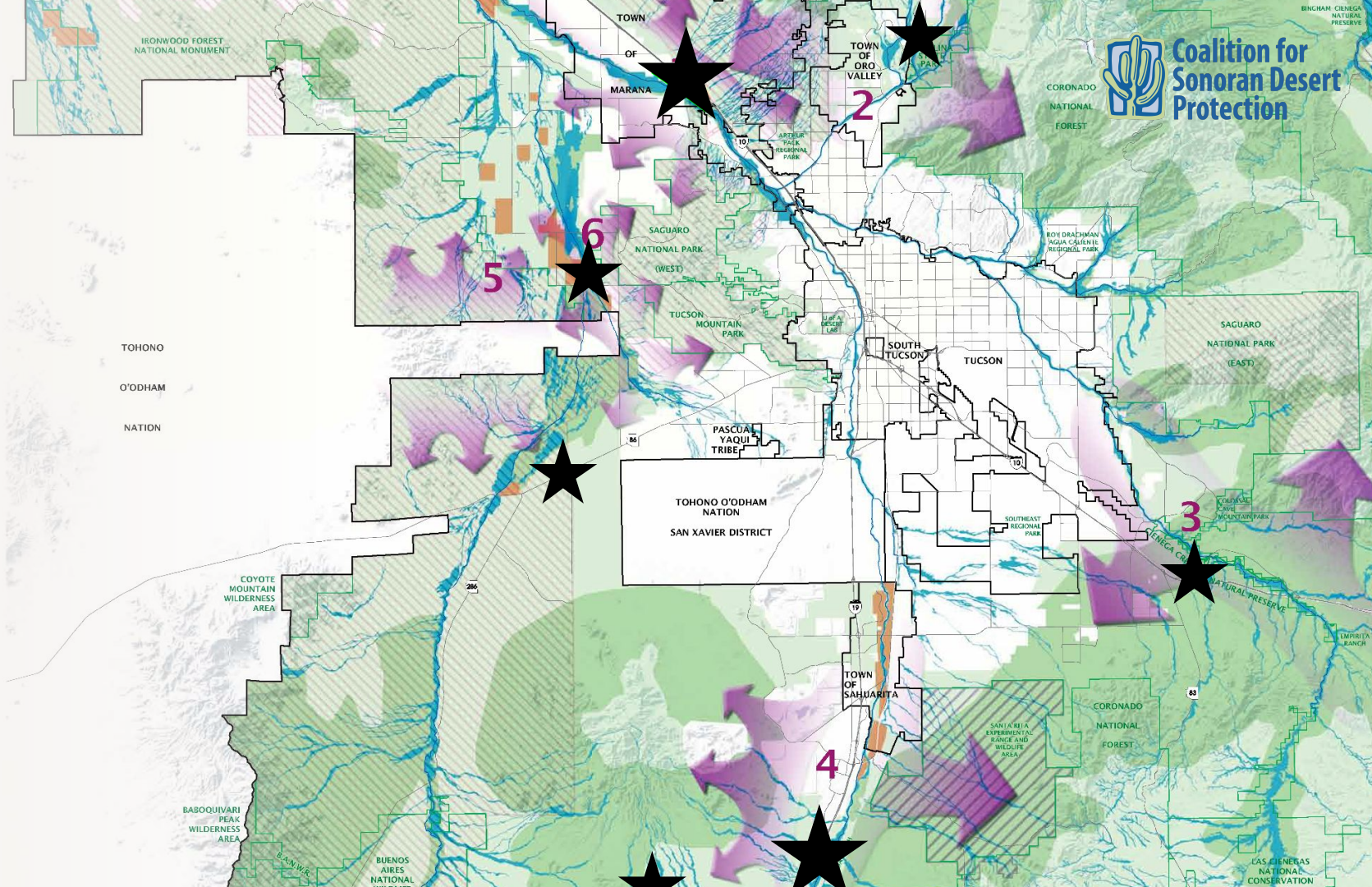
SANTA RITA  
EXPERIMENTAL  
RANCH AND  
WILDLIFE  
AREA

CORONADO  
NATIONAL  
FOREST

SAN JUAN  
MOUNTAIN  
PARK

SAN JUAN  
MOUNTAIN  
PARK

SAN JUAN  
MOUNTAIN  
PARK



TOHONO  
O'ODHAM  
NATION

IRONWOOD FOREST  
NATIONAL MONUMENT

TOWN  
OF

MARANA

TOWN  
OF

ORO VALLEY

CORONADO  
NATIONAL  
FOREST

ROY DRACHMAN  
AGUA CALIENTE  
REGIONAL PARK

SAGUARO  
NATIONAL PARK  
(WEST)

TUCSON MOUNTAIN  
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SOUTH  
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PASCUA  
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TOHONO O'ODHAM  
NATION  
SAN XAVIER DISTRICT

SOUTHEAST  
REGIONAL PARK

VENIEGA CREEK  
NATURAL PRESERVE

COYOTE MOUNTAIN  
WILDERNESS AREA

BABOQUIVARI  
PEAK  
WILDERNESS AREA

BUENOS AIRES  
NATIONAL

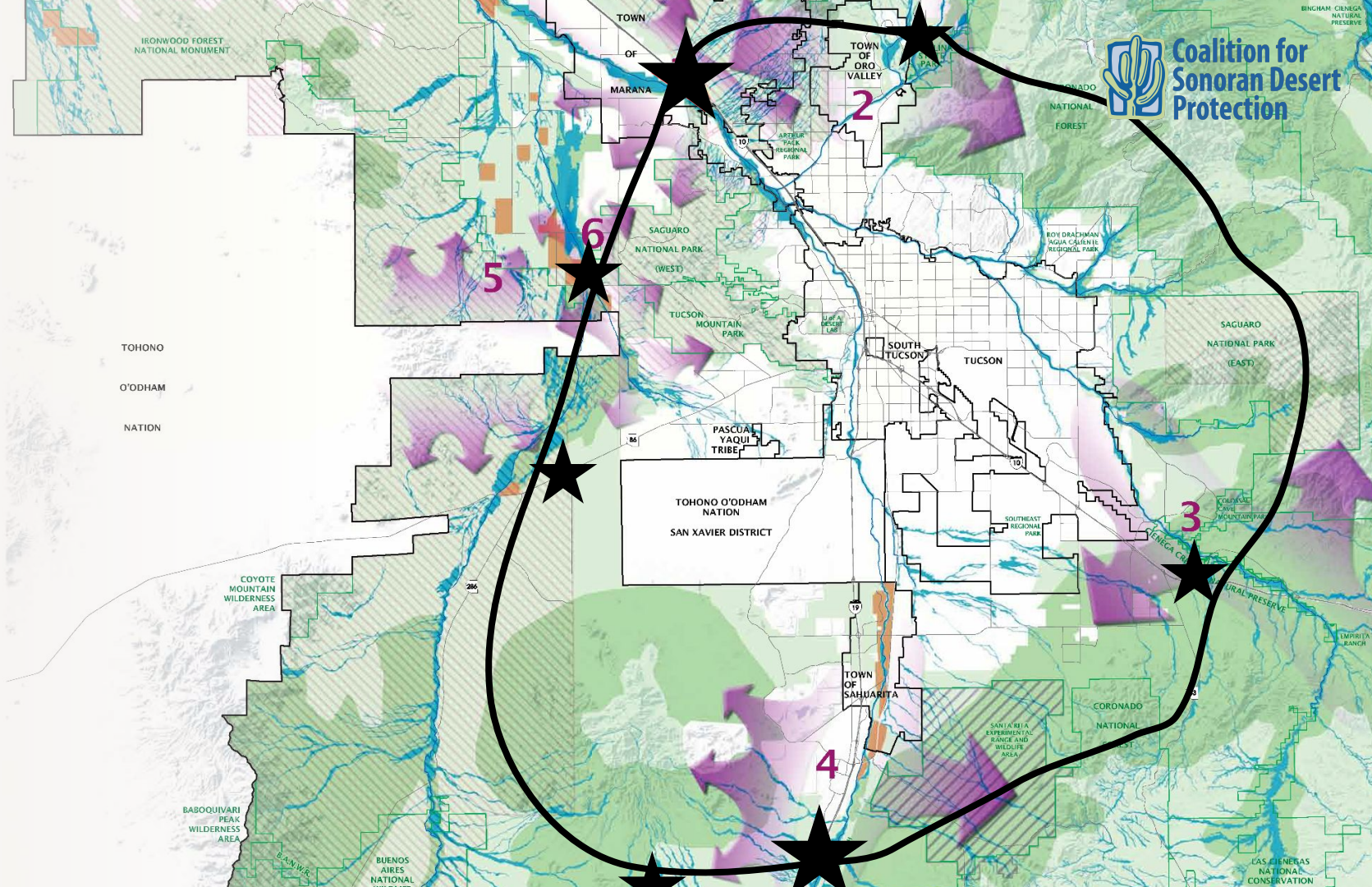
TOWN  
OF

SAHUARITA

SANTA RITA  
EXPERIMENTAL  
RANCH AND  
WILDLIFE  
AREA

CORONADO  
NATIONAL  
FOREST

CAS CILLERAS  
NATIONAL  
CONSERVATION



TOHONO  
O'ODHAM  
NATION

## Other funding sources?

- Federal funding correlated with road hazards for *people*
- = larger animals than most here in the Sonoran Desert
- Complements, not replaces, local funding
- Relatively new (FHWA Wildlife Crossings Program est. in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021)
- Much more likely now than when the Oracle Rd work began!





## How to advocate for wildlife crossings

# Respond to the RTA Next Survey

- Only 12 questions
- **3 questions where you can directly advocate for wildlife crossings!**
- Multiple responses per person are allowed
- **Closes Fri Jan 31, 2025 - don't wait!**
- Next steps: public comment presented to the RTA Board



[rtanext.com/survey](https://rtanext.com/survey)



## RTA Next Survey: Q2

### Question:

Which proposed line items (Nos. 1-50) in the RTA Next draft plan represent the highest priority for you? If any, please list up to five line items that you are most interested in as part of the overall plan.

### Suggested response:

“Line item 43: Wildlife Linkages”



## RTA Next Survey: Q9

### Question:

Of the \$2 billion available for new investments, \$25 million is proposed to be spent on Wildlife Linkage improvements. In your opinion, is this amount too little, too much, or just right?

### Suggested response:

“Too little”



## RTA Next Survey: Q11

**Question:**

What do you believe is the single most important item that should be changed (added/ deleted/ modified) in the RTA Next draft plan to gain your overall support of the plan?

**Suggested response:**

“Funding for wildlife linkages must be increased to the full \$50 million, as was recommended by the Citizens Advisory Committee and representatives from all local governments, with none of the \$50 million included in the contingency.”



## Bonus advocacy!

### Share the RTA Next survey with others

- The more responses we get, the more likely it is that our message is heard
- Spread the word!

### Submit a comment at [rtanext.com/comment](https://rtanext.com/comment)

- Use the RTA's public comment form to provide more detail

### Write a custom comment or survey response






**“The choice is not  
between wild places  
and people, it is  
between a rich or  
impoverished  
existence...”**

***- Thomas Lovejoy***



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RTA Next survey  
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