

## 4. TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

This chapter presents a discussion of the transportation related issues for the Coolidge-Florence study area including issues concerning growth, regional connectivity, street system within the study area, safety, and multimodal transportation. In addition, opportunities and constraints are discussed in regard to addressing the transportation related issues. The discussion of the issues is based on the study team's understanding gained from an analysis of transportation and demographic studies and plans, discussion with key stakeholders, and a field view of the study area.

### GROWTH ISSUES

- Major development growth is occurring throughout Pinal County, with population projections as high as two million people in 2030. Recent growth began in the Johnson Ranch Area, jumped to the City of Maricopa, and is now leaping to the Coolidge-Florence area. Very large planned developments are under construction in the area including those by Pulte Homes in Anthem at Merrill Ranch in Florence and Martin Valley in Coolidge.
- Potential population in the Coolidge-Florence area could be as high as five hundred thousand people. This rapid growth is putting extensive pressure on the transportation infrastructure—roadway capacity is inadequate, regional connections are limited, and multimodal facilities are lacking.
- A very significant amount of the land within the study area is State Trust Land, primarily located in the southeastern and northern (part of the 275 square-mile Superstition Vista area) portions of the study area. The planning and disposition of the trust land is a critical issue on how land will develop in the area. As an example, the Coolidge Municipal Airport is encircled by trust land and future planning should consider the integration of the development on this trust land with the industrial development of the airport property. Close coordination with the Arizona State Land Department (ASLD) is key to successful development of trust land.
- The Signal Peaks Campus of the Central Arizona Community College is located on North Overfield Road, approximately halfway between Phoenix and Tucson. Learning centers of the College are located in Florence and Casa Grande. The full-time student equivalent on the Signal Peaks Campus was approximately 1,600 in 2002. Access by multimodal transportation facilities both locally and regionally to the Signal Peaks Campus and learning centers is an issue that needs to be addressed as population grows.

## REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY

- **Providing New Regional Connections.** Constructing new regional highway facilities and improving existing facilities is needed to provide mobility and safety for people and goods. The Pinal County Small Area Transportation Study (SATS) and the Pinal County Corridors Definition Study has recommended future freeway corridors, enhancements to the state highway system, and Regionally Significant Routes (RSR) that provide a starting for this study to examine regional connectivity. The Pinal County developed a regional system of arterial and collector roads based on projected future development.
- The Pinal County Corridors Definition Study identified the need and possible locations for a north-south corridor from US 60 and Loop 202 through the Coolidge-Florence area, connecting to I-10. Constructing a proposed future freeway corridor will greatly increase the regional accessibility to and from the study area. A 2007 study was undertaken to evaluate alternative options for the north-south corridor in the Coolidge-Florence area and the options were presented to the public at public meetings in the Town of Florence and the City of Coolidge. Issues in locating the corridor include the constraints of 500 kV power line, planned developments in the entitlement process, Anthem at Merrill Ranch, Westcor Mall, and Pulte Homes. Other issues include the Magma Dam and a crossing over the Gila River. ADOT will soon begin Location/Design Concept and Environmental Studies to locate a North South Freeway alignment.
- The upgrade of existing state highways is also very important to improve regional accessibility including SR 79, SR 87, SR 287, and SR 387.
- The ongoing Casa Grande Small Area Transportation Study (SATS) is updating the planning transportation system for the Casa Grande Planning Area adjacent to the Coolidge-Florence study area. The development of the Coolidge-Florence regional transportation plan must be coordinated with the planned system for the Casa Grande Planning Area.

## STREET SYSTEM WITHIN THE STUDY AREA

- **Constructing a Continuous Well Developed Street System.** A continuous arterial and collector system with adequate capacity to handle future traffic volumes is essential for both the internal and regional circulation. One goal to achieve a continuous system is to accommodate the arterial system in development plans. This requires coordination with developments, municipalities, the Gila River Indian Community, and other stakeholders. One particular problem involves section line offsets and their effect on the arterial network and the division of developable land. Moreover, consistency of roadway functional classifications and roadway cross sections throughout the region is important to provide an efficient and safe regional roadway system. Since many of the

roads in the study area are currently owned, operated, and maintained by Pinal County, this study must coordinate with the County in developing a street system.

- **Providing Circulation System within Developments.** Providing an adequate internal street system by the new developments will reduce traffic volumes on major arterials and state highways. Ensuring emergency vehicles access to residential and commercial areas is another issue.
- **Constructing New Gila River Crossings.** New Gila River crossings are important for providing regional connectivity. Florence, Coolidge, and Pinal County are in general agreement that an additional bridge crossing of the Gila River is needed to meet future travel demands in the area.
- **Widening Existing Bridges.** Existing bridges of the Gila River may need to be widened at Attaway Road, SR 87, and SR 79. Of course, construction costs for this widening is a major issue.
- **Constructing New Interchanges on I-10.** New interchanges on I-10 may be needed to improve the overall regional traffic circulation. Potential interchanges include Val Vista Road, Randolph Road alignment, the Woodruff Road, and Kleck Road alignment. Other existing I-10 interchanges may need to be improved. Planning for potential new traffic interchanges should be coordinated with the ongoing I-10 Widening Study (Design Concept Report/Environmental Assessment (DCR/EA)).
- **Improving Access to the Coolidge Airport.** The successful economic development of the airport industrial area and aviation operations depends upon a well-developed roadway system including regional connections. Moreover, multimodal services such as shuttle services will be needed.

## TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM MANAGEMENT

- **Implementing Access Management.** Access management must be implemented on state highways, municipal streets, and county roads to preserve capacity and maintain safety as development occurs.
- **Providing Truck Route Designations.** Large numbers of trucks travel through the study area on state highways and regional roads such as Hunt Highway. As traffic growth occurs, there will be a growing need for truck routes through the area.
- **Implementing Travel Demand Management.** As population density increases, the management of travel demand will become important. Management strategies could include a transportation coordinator to oversee the program, ride-sharing programs, park-and-ride facilities, and parking management.

## SAFETY ISSUES

- **Vehicular and Pedestrian Safety.** The crash history on existing roads needs to be evaluated to determine if vehicular and pedestrian safety is an issue within the study area.
- **Railroad Crossings.** Safety at railroad at-grade crossings is an issue that needs to be evaluated by analyzing crash history.

## MULTIMODAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

- **Providing Regional Multimodal Transportation Facilities.** A need exists for multimodal facilities of regional significance in addition to streets and highways. Both the Union Pacific Railroad line and Copper Basin Railway are important transportation assets. The study area for a *Commuter Rail Strategic Plan* being developed for the Maricopa Association of Governments incorporates Northern Pinal County including the study area for the Coolidge-Florence Regional Transportation Study. Future commuter rail service could include service to Coolidge and Florence along the Union Pacific Railroad's Phoenix Subdivision and the Copper Basin Railway. The likely initial route for a Phoenix-Tucson high speed rail service being studied by ADOT would also be the Phoenix Subdivision of the Union Pacific, which bisects the study area from north to south, passing through the City of Coolidge. In addition, interest has been expressed in establishing excursion rail service on the Copper Basin Railway line east of Florence. The possibility for a rail switching yard exists depending on the future practices of the Union Pacific Railroad. Other potential facilities include High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, park-and ride lots, transit centers, and rail passenger stations.
- **Improving Multimodal Access to the City of Coolidge Municipal Airport.** Access to the airport by automobile, bus shuttles, and taxi cabs will enhance the economic viability of the airport operations and related industrial areas.
- **Improving and Expanding Local Transit Service.** As development increases, expansion of the Cotton Express service area will be needed. In addition, to expanding service within Coolidge, there may be an opportunity to expand service to Florence.
- **Providing Trail, Pedestrian, and Bicycle Facilities.** A well developed system of trail, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities will help to balance transportation within the study area.

## OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

- **Coordinating with Stakeholders.** The success of implementing this plan depends upon the communications among multiple agencies, jurisdictions, and community stakeholders both internal and external to Florence and Coolidge. This study is an opportunity to begin removing barriers to various constraints. As an example, transportation facilities within the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) such as SR 87 affect and are affected by local and regional travel in Florence and Coolidge. Open communication between the GRIC Department of Transportation and the municipalities are critical to discuss opportunities and constraints and move toward evaluating transportation options.
- **New Development.** New development in the study area is occurring very rapidly, spreading over many square miles. The new development within the study area poses both opportunities and constraints and provides an opportunity to develop guidelines for reviewing development plans and identifying opportunities to integrate connecting transportation facilities into development plans. However, the site design of new development often constrains constructing a connecting facility or improving an existing facility.
- **Protecting Cultural and Environmental Resources.** The study area contains a richness of archaeological resources from ancient ruins and canals to 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings. Any proposed infrastructure improvements must recognize the potential impacts on archaeological resources. The Casa Grande National Monument and nearby sites are outstanding Hohokam resources dating back more than a thousand years. Historic buildings are located throughout the area including the buildings in the Historic Downtown Florence and the Coolidge Downtown Historical District. The area contains many types of Arizona desert flora. The northern portion of the study area lies within the Gila River flood plain composed of native vegetation and species habitats. Another environmental factor will be air pollution as new development occurs due to both dust control during construction and vehicular pollution.
- **Recognizing Physical Constraints.** The development of a transportation system must seek opportunities to address physical constraints such as the Central Arizona Project Canal, Gila River Flood Plain, proposed new 500 kV power line, existing railroad line, and other physical constraints.
- **Economic Development.** The development of an efficient and safe transportation system is an opportunity to foster economic growth in the area by capturing transportation benefits to reduce transportation costs for business, which in turn create new jobs. Improving regional mobility will expand both the labor and trade market areas. Also, improved accessibility of the area to other parts of the state will encourage an increase in tourism.