



South Mountain Transportation Corridor Study

Citizens Advisory Team
Draft Technical Report Summary

Prime and Unique Farmland

Why study prime and unique farmland in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

The Phoenix metropolitan area is founded in agriculture and is rich in its agricultural history. As the area has developed, agricultural land has been converted to nonagricultural uses at a rapid pace. The phenomenon is not unique to just the Phoenix metropolitan area. In fact, at the national level, Congress recognized that the nation's farmlands are a unique natural resource providing food and fiber necessary for the continued welfare of the people of the United States. Each year, however, extensive farmland acreage is irrevocably converted from actual or potential agricultural use to nonagricultural uses. In response, Congress enacted the Farmland Protection Policy Act (FPPA) (7 Code of Federal Regulations [C.F.R.] Part 658). The act's purpose is to "minimize the extent to which Federal programs contribute to the unnecessary and irreversible conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses, and to assure that Federal programs are administered in a manner that, to the extent practicable, will be compatible with State, unit of local government, and private programs and policies to protect farmland."

A substantial portion of the Western Section of the Study Area is in agricultural use; rapid, planned development is contributing to the conversion of this land to residential, business and industrial uses. The purpose of studying potential impacts on farmland is to determine whether such impacts would unnecessarily contribute to such a conversion and whether such a project would be consistent with state and local plans.

What kind of impacts could occur from construction?

The types of environmental impacts that could occur as a result of implementing this proposed project include:

- direct—actions or projects that result in making land nonfarmable (building or construction on a specific area that would cause a direct impact)
- indirect—may include isolation of remnant parcels (agricultural land that would be divided by a project, such as a freeway, resulting in one or both parcels being isolated and nonfarmable) or removing land adjacent to a specific impact area from agricultural production



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How do the alternatives differ in construction-related impacts?

All action alternatives would convert some agricultural land to a nonagricultural transportation-related use as shown in the table below.

Farmland Conversion

Alternative/Option	Total Acres
Western Section Alternatives	
W55	527
W71	810
W101, Western Option	969
W101, Central Option	952
W101, Eastern Option	947
Eastern Section Alternative	
E1	156

The majority of agricultural land is located in the Western Section of the Study Area. As shown in the table, the amount of farmland that would be converted to a transportation use increases with alternatives as they move from the east to the west; consequently, the W101 Alternative and options would have the greatest impact on farmland. Additional factors should be considered. 1) The W55 Alternative is the easternmost of the alternatives and, as currently planned, would closely follow the freeway alignment as it has been planned for more than 20 years. Unlike the W71 and W101 alternatives, much of the land in or adjacent to what has been planned as the W55 Alternative right-of-way is anticipated to become commercial and industrial. 2) Urbanization is progressing rapidly westward. By the time freeway construction were to begin, it is likely that farmland acreage converted to a transportation use for the westernmost alternatives would be less than currently being reported, because such land would likely have already been converted from agricultural to residential, commercial and/or industrial uses. 3) When considered as farmland conversion per freeway mile, the impact would be relatively the same, with the exception of the W55 Alternative for reasons described above.

The Eastern Section of the Study Area contains prime and unique farmland acreage near 51st Avenue and Carver Road. No farmland is located along the Pecos Road section.

What kind of freeway operational impacts (postconstruction) could occur?

Depending on plot size and crop type, farmland parcels not directly affected by the proposed freeway could become too small to economically support agricultural production and would, therefore, be eliminated from further commitment to agricultural use.

How do the alternatives differ in operational-related impacts?

When operational, none of the action alternatives would appreciably differ in the types or magnitude of impacts they would cause.



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What if the project were not constructed?

There would be no freeway-related impact on farmland if the project were not constructed. Because of anticipated—and planned—continued urbanization of the Phoenix metropolitan area, it is likely that farmland in the Western Section of the Study Area would eventually be converted to urban uses.

What could the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) do to reduce or avoid impacts?

The potential to avoid conversion of any prime and unique farmland attributable to impacts of any alternative or option is minimal. Prime and unique farmland, as defined by the FPPA, is extensive throughout the Study Area. Measures to reduce any impact would be evaluated where appropriate, and could include:

- provision for access to farmland otherwise made inaccessible by the project
- provision for protection, replacement or substitution of important farmland acreage

What could ADOT do to reduce construction impacts?

Agricultural practices adjacent to freeway construction could be affected by implementation of the proposed project. Impacts could include surface water runoff into irrigation canals and farm fields, impediments to the efficient movement of farm equipment, and construction-related emissions and dust on crops. ADOT could undertake several actions to minimize these types of impacts.

With respect to surface water-related impacts, Section 402 National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) of the Clean Water Act requires that ADOT, or its contractor, obtain a permit before beginning construction.

The permit requires that a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) be prepared. The plan would include what are known as best management practices for controlling construction-related pollution discharge. Some measures that ADOT could use to reduce impacts in the floodplains during construction include:

- constructing silt barriers
- ensuring construction equipment is in good working order
- creating sediment basins
- using controlled equipment fueling and maintenance areas
- ensuring proper disposal of potentially contaminated materials
- limiting vegetation removal and soil disturbance
- seeding and mulching exposed slopes immediately after construction
- ensuring existing flows of existing canals and irrigation water



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With respect to air quality-related impacts, ADOT or its contractor would prepare and obtain an approved *Application for Earth Moving Permit, Demolition, and Dust Control Plan* in accordance with Maricopa County Rule 310, Fugitive Dust Ordinance, before beginning construction. The permit would describe measures to control and regulate air pollutant emissions during construction.

ADOT would implement a right-of-way acquisition program in accordance with appropriate state and federal laws. ADOT would coordinate with affected property owners as part of the acquisition process to provide access for farm equipment between divided agricultural parcels, or to purchase remaining farm parcels considered too small to farm either economically or functionally.

Are the conclusions presented in this summary final?

Quantitative findings relative to impacts could change. Potential changes would be based on outcomes related to the following issues and will be presented to the public as part of publication of the Draft EIS, Final EIS and, if an action alternative were selected, in the final design process. The issues include:

- refinement in design features through the design process
- updated aerial photography as it relates to rapid growth in the Western Section of the Study Area
- ongoing communications with the City of Phoenix regarding measures to minimize harm to Phoenix South Mountain Park/Preserve
- ongoing communications with the Gila River Indian Community (GRIC) regarding granting permission to study action alternatives on GRIC land
- ongoing consideration of public comments
- potential updates to traffic forecasts as regularly revised by the Maricopa Association of Governments
- potential changes regarding updated census data
- regularly updated cost estimates for construction, right-of-way acquisition, relocation and mitigation

Even with these factors possibly affecting findings, the study team anticipates effects would be equal among the alternatives and, consequently, impacts would be roughly comparable. This assumption would be confirmed if, and when, such changes were to occur.

As a member of the Citizens Advisory Team, how can you review the entire technical report?

The complete technical report is available for review by making an appointment with Mike Bruder at 602-712-6836 or Mark Hollowell at 602-712-6819.