

Abridgment

Phoenix: Effective Citizen Participation in Implementing Transportation Improvements

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Two major citizen participation success stories in the City of Phoenix are summarized: (a) voter approval of the Papago Freeway (I-10) project in 1979 and (b) a number of bond elections since 1957 in which voters approved major street construction. The third citywide vote on the Papago Freeway, in 1979, demonstrated overwhelming support for this project and for the entire planned urban freeway system. There was a 57 percent voter turnout, and the vote was 73 percent in favor. The political, business, labor, health service, and real estate interests, the highway user community, and civic and service organizations united under the banner of the Citizens Transportation Council. More than 100 organizations joined. Although the final vote was truly a mandate by the people to proceed rapidly with the project, the federal government, with its procedures and regulations, has not been able to respond rapidly. Thus, the Papago Freeway is still not under construction. In 1957, the first citizens bond election provided \$6 million in highway user revenue bonds for major street construction in a total City bond program of \$70 million. Again in 1961, 1975, and 1979, voters approved revenue bonds for major streets. The 1979 bond program authorized \$63 million. The latest bond election, held in May 1979, is examined to illustrate the organization, citizen leadership, and participation of the Phoenix bond committees. Since 1960, the City has completed more than 156 miles of modern major streets plus numerous structures.

The City of Phoenix has a long history of vigorous citizen participation. This has been fostered and actively supported by both the civic and the political leadership of the community. It began with the citizen reform movement of "charter government" in 1949, which led to high-quality city government under the council-manager plan. Since then, Phoenix has three times been selected an All-American City by the National Municipal League for actively involving citizens in local government. The awards came in 1950, 1958, and 1980.

With this heritage of active citizen involvement and support, it is not surprising that transportation has generated public interest and benefited from informed public support. This paper highlights two major citizen participation success stories in Phoenix.

PAPAGO FREEWAY

Beginning in early 1973, public attitude toward the Papago Freeway (Interstate 10) began shifting away from one of full community support. This was probably precipitated by the unique, high-elevated design of the freeway in the city's center, conceived by an architectural team, combined with some "anti-freewayism" and a loss of support from the principal newspaper. A group of citizens, basically from neighborhoods near the freeway, with support from the newspaper, requested that the City Council hold an "advisory vote". A "nonbinding" election was finally held in May 1973. The vote was 58 percent against the freeway or its design. The voter turnout was 36 percent. The result stopped the freeway in its tracks at a point when 71 percent of the right-of-way was in hand and construction plans for substantial segments were nearing completion or under way.

As a result of the vote and public forums, the Maricopa Association of Governments and the City of Phoenix went to work looking for alternatives in a comprehensive reevaluation study. A City Citizen Study Committee was also created to assist in looking for alternatives. It appeared that the corner-

stone of a modern transportation system was about to be lost.

Against these odds, in the spring of 1975 a nucleus of about 50 citizens was formed that was dedicated to modern transportation, urban freeways, and particularly to the Papago Freeway. Their purpose was to formulate and circulate an initiative petition to reestablish the Papago Inner Loop as the alignment for I-10 through Phoenix as the policy of the City of Phoenix.

There were many who thought it could not be done. Contributions were very difficult to obtain following the economic conditions of 1974. However, the group did raise approximately \$14 000.

The group adopted the acronym UNITE (Use Now I-Ten Effectively). They worked tirelessly to draft, circulate, and file initiative petitions containing more than 22 000 signatures. This assured the placement of the proposition before the voters at the next city election. The battle was thus engaged. All speaking requests were honored by the group. The issue was made clear: Did Phoenix want the Papago Freeway and its inner loop as the foundation of an adequate and total transportation system?

The voters answered, "Yes!" There was a 53 percent voter turnout, and the vote was 54 percent for the Papago Freeway. Once again, the policy of the City of Phoenix was redirected to the Papago Inner Loop for the completion of I-10.

Four years later, in 1979, a small but determined group, including some of those previously opposed to the Papago Freeway, circulated a new initiative labeled the "Grid Plan" in a last effort to kill the project and all urban freeways in Phoenix. Again, the issue was placed before the voters.

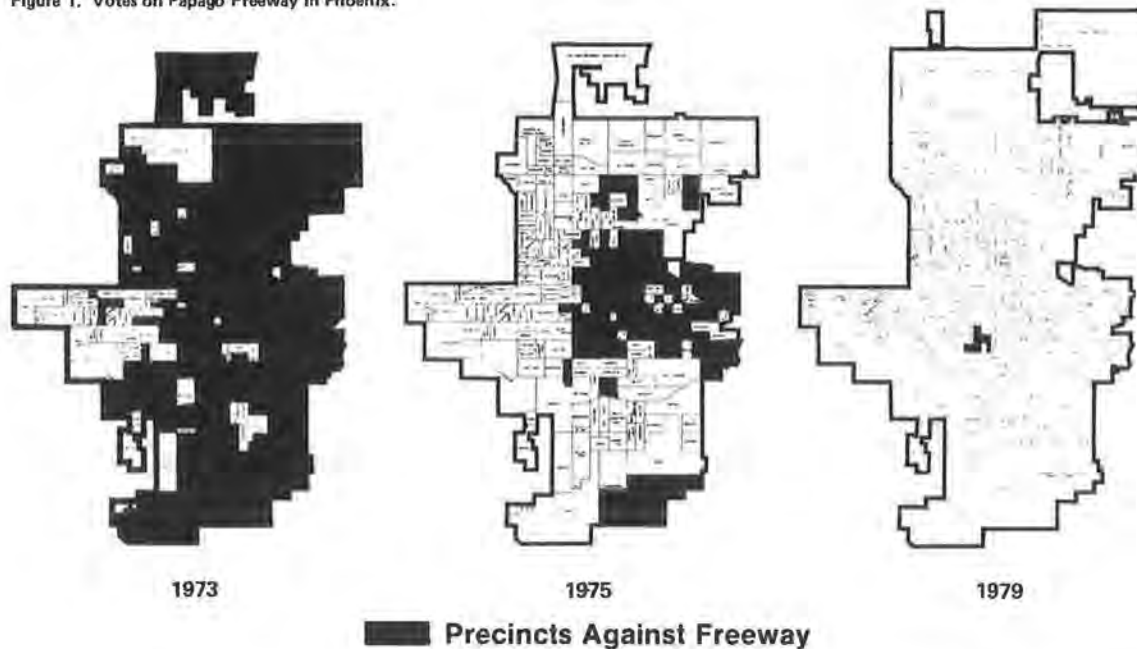
By this time the community was acutely aware of the growing traffic congestion and the developing transportation crisis in Phoenix. It was recognized that time was running out. Almost without exception, the political, business, labor, health service, and real estate interests, the entire highway user community, and civic and service organizations were unified in the fight to defeat the so-called Grid Plan. The opposition to the Grid Plan unified under the banner of a Citizens Transportation Council (CTC) and raised funds, secured workers, and selected speakers. More than 100 organizations became members of the CTC.

The basic objective of the Grid Plan was to stop the Papago Freeway and its inner loop. The Grid Plan campaign offered voters an inducement of several hundred million dollars in federal Interstate transfer money to pay for major street construction, transit improvements, and an outer-loop highway in exchange for a future without urban freeways.

This was the third vote involving the Papago Freeway in six years. The CTC objective was to defeat the Grid Plan decisively in order to put the issue to rest once and for all. In addition, the CTC knew that it would be faced with confusion among freeway supporters, who would have to vote no in order to vote in favor of the freeways.

The CTC waged a highly visible campaign by using paid media, direct mail, and public relations activ-

Figure 1. Votes on Papago Freeway in Phoenix.



ities to reach the general electorate, combined with targeted mail and telephone canvassing in selected precincts where higher-than-average turnout was considered critical. The CTC began operating a 30-phone telephone bank three and one-half weeks prior to the election. Its goal was to call voters in 70 target precincts in the west and north areas, emphasize the antifreeway effects of a vote for the Grid Plan, and get the voters to turn out.

The Grid Plan antifreeway forces also conducted a major campaign. It began with a signature-gathering drive that lasted seven months and produced some 30 000 signatures. The Grid Plan supporters produced a considerable volume of direct mail. Many people received Grid Plan mailings twice. One late tactic was to mail letters to homeowners near all of the proposed urban freeway corridors warning them that their homes were in jeopardy. This one mailing may have reached as many as 25 000 households. Grid Plan funds also bought small amounts of television, radio, and newspaper space. In summary, the Grid Plan campaign effort was not insignificant.

On May 6, 1979, the Grid Plan was soundly defeated by an unprecedented margin of 73 percent with a 57 percent voter turnout. In this election, Phoenix voters delivered the strongest possible message to the political leadership of the city and the state that transportation is the foremost local issue of the day and that an urban freeway system is a necessary part of the solution. This was not merely a vote to reject the Grid Plan or simply an endorsement of the Papago Freeway. It was a mandate for construction of a total, modern, balanced transportation system planned and designed to serve the Phoenix urban area densities and form.

The results of the three votes on the Papago Freeway are most graphically shown in Figure 1.

Over the past decade, the Papago Freeway has produced every conceivable type and degree of citizen involvement and participation. Each of the three citywide votes was the climax of a sequence or phase. The final vote was truly a mandate by the people to proceed rapidly with the freeway. Unfortunately, the federal government, with its procedures and regulations, has not been able to respond rapidly to the local citizen mandate. The

Papago Freeway is still not under construction in the City of Phoenix.

The Secretary of Transportation gave location approval to the freeway on October 2, 1978. It is estimated that delays are adding to the costs of this needed facility at a rate of about \$5 million/month. Currently, the delay results from archaeological pursuits. The completion of the Papago Freeway is urgently needed to provide safe, modern transportation services to a rapidly growing city and urban region.

MAJOR STREET SYSTEM CONSTRUCTION

Because of the long delay in building a much-needed urban freeway system, major streets have been the backbone of the transportation system of the City of Phoenix. Only 11 percent of daily vehicle miles of travel in the Phoenix urban area is carried by the existing freeway system. The contribution of modern major streets to improved operation of the bus system further emphasizes the need for construction of major streets to modern standards.

The importance of improving the major street system has long been recognized and supported by Phoenix citizens and elected mayors and councils. In 1957, the first city citizens bond election provided \$6 million in highway user revenue bonds for major street construction in a total city bond program of \$70 million. Again in 1961, 1975, and 1979, voters approved highway user revenue bonds for major streets.

In each bond program, the pattern of success has been similar. First, the factual needs studies are developed, generally by city staff. Second, the Mayor and City Council appoint three or four key civic leaders as a steering committee that in turn appoints a subcommittee chairman for each area of need, such as major streets, water, sewers, parks, transit, and aviation. Then these subcommittee heads join with the steering committee to form an executive committee that appoints the membership of each of the program area subcommittees.

A closer look at the latest bond election, held in May 1979, will illustrate the workings and citizen leadership and participation of the Phoenix Citizens Bond Committee.

Citizen involvement in the 1979 Phoenix Citizens Bond Committee began in November 1978, when the Mayor and the City Council appointed a Steering Committee composed of four citizens. The Steering Committee then asked 18 citizens to serve on the Executive Committee as heads of subcommittees. The Executive Committee members then appointed some 250 individuals to serve on the subcommittees. In January 1979, the Citizens Bond Committee received a \$322.4 million package of needs and bond requests from the City Manager and was asked to study and make recommendations to the City Council on each of the proposals. These citizens spent thousands of hours analyzing and shaping the vitally needed bond program. The Citizens Bond Committee recommended 17 separate propositions for inclusion in a \$354.4 million bond election. This was actually \$32 million more than the bond proposal of the City Manager.

The 1979 Phoenix Citizens Bond Committee sought membership from a complete cross section of the community, including finance and business, development interests, labor unions, minority groups, service clubs, and public interest groups. Once the bond issues were set, the Committee raised more than \$100 000 from the private sector to promote the bond drive. A Citizen Public Relations Subcommittee organized the bond promotion campaign, which consisted of radio and television commercials, more than 70 public speaking appearances, and endorsements from the printed media. These efforts succeeded in getting 30 percent of all registered voters to turn out.

In May 1979, voters approved 16 of the 17 bond proposals for a total of \$353.2 million to be sold over the next five to seven years. This bond authorization was unique because it was the largest bond authorization in the City's history and it also represented one of the biggest votes of approval for municipal services anywhere in the nation in the last year following the California Proposition 13 movement. Citizen involvement was the critical part of this successful bond issue: Citizens studied the City's capital needs and financing capabilities, made recommendations to the City Council on which issues should appear on the ballot, and finally sold the public on their value.

The 1979 bond program authorized \$63 million in highway user revenue bonds for major street and bridge improvements. This, when combined with the City's share of the state highway user revenues and federal aid urban funds, provided a 1979 six-year major street construction program of \$130 million to improve about 104 miles of major streets. As is common throughout the country, inflation and decreasing highway user revenues reduced the 1980 program.

Phoenix has 450 miles of major streets plus many bridges of various sizes. Since 1960, the City has constructed more than 156 miles of modern major streets plus four large railroad overcrossings and numerous bridges over rivers, canals, and washes. The annualized rate of construction has accelerated from 1 mile/year in 1960 to more than 25 miles in 1978-1979.

The 1979 Citizens Bond Program also provided \$3.3 million in general obligation bonds for the City's share of the transit capital program of \$16.5 million and \$12 million in general obligation bonds for local and collector street improvement districts where the City and the property owners share in the cost.

It is worth noting that private property owners, in cooperation with the City of Phoenix, have improved more than 351 miles of substandard local and collector streets to modern standards since 1960 by using improvement district procedures. Another example of citizen participation--another success story!

CONCLUSIONS

The success of Phoenix with citizen participation, involvement, and support is one reason why we in Phoenix question the need for additional federal regulations and requirements in this area, where determinations are best made at the local level. Certainly, the actions initiated by large numbers of informed citizens to reestablish and then to overwhelmingly mandate the Papago Freeway are an outstanding demonstration of citizen involvement and support for a clearly defined major issue and problem facing a growing urban area and its principal city. Unfortunately, the extensive public involvement in the Papago Freeway has not yet resulted in its construction. This highlights a serious flaw in the federal and state regulations and procedures: The procedures are there for rapidly halting a project, as was done in 1973, but not for rapidly reactivating and constructing it.

The modern history of the City of Phoenix is replete with examples of active citizen participation and support of good government and its programs. The successive citizen bond programs have provided the City with funds for large capital programs over more than two decades. These have included substantial funds for major street and bridge construction. The rapid construction of attractive, cost-effective facilities to serve the citizens of Phoenix and match the City's growth is the goal and the end product of the citizen bond programs.