RESOLUTION NO. 16-05-02

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF GILA COUNTY, ARIZONA, SUPPORTING COMPLETION OF THE IMPROVEMENTS TO HIGHWAY 260 IN THE AREA OF LION SPRINGS IN GILA COUNTY.

WHEREAS, the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) has spent over 300 million dollars improving Highway 87, from Phoenix to Payson, constructing a modern four lane divided highway; and,

WHEREAS, ADOT has also spent over 300 million dollars improving Highway 260 east of the Lion Springs area to the top of the Mogollon Rim, constructing a modern four lane divided highway; and,

WHEREAS, ADOT staff has recommended removing funding for improvements on Highway 260 in the area of Lion Springs in Gila County from its current Five-Year Program; and,

WHEREAS, such recommendation, if approved, would effectively create a bottleneck (i.e., an undivided two lane roadway surrounded on both sides by a four lane divided highway) in the corridor between Phoenix and the top of the Mogollon Rim; and,

WHEREAS, completing the four lane divided highway in the area of Lion Springs, in addition to removing this last remaining bottleneck, would provide the following benefits:

A. *Improved safety to motorists.* This last remaining section is the source of significant accidents, both in number and severity. Because of the speeds involved and the narrowness of the roadway, many collisions in the area result in serious injury and, at times, death.

B. *Improved visitor access.* Highway 260, east of Payson and Star Valley, is the gateway to numerous high use recreation areas in the Tonto National Forest and the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, as well as northeastern Arizona communities such as Heber, Snowflake, Show Low and Pinetop-Lakeside. Residents from all over Arizona and visitors from around the United States enjoy these recreation areas. During many summer days, and especially holiday weekends, this unfinished section of highway is more reminiscent of an urban freeway during rush hours (i.e., bumper to bumper traffic) than a highway through the beautiful pines of northern Arizona.

C. *Improved environmental benefits.* During summer months and especially during holiday

weekends, traffic in this area can come to a standstill. The exhaust from thousands of cars significantly impacts the pristine mountain air.

D. *Improved quality of life.* The traffic backlogs created by the bottleneck affect the main thoroughfares of both Payson and Star Valley. This creates traffic nightmares for the residents of these communities and it results in decreased sales for the local businesses.

E. *Protection of watershed and wildlife habitats.* Improvements to this section of Highway 260 will reduce the creation of unauthorized roads/trails into the forest protecting both the watershed and wildlife habitats. The current two lane roadway allows for almost unlimited egress from the roadway. The result is motor vehicle damage to the watershed and habitats. The modern four lane divided highway provides for only limited egress, thus protecting these watersheds and habitats.

F. *Reduced erosion.* The improvements to Highway 260 and the plans for the Lion Springs segment incorporate modern erosion control features. Such improved erosion control features need to be completed in coordination with this remaining segment.

G. *Reduced wildlife, vehicular collisions.* This area has a high density of elk. This combination of high elk density and a narrow two lane roadway creates dangerous elk/vehicle collisions. Not only are these elk/vehicle collisions common, but because of the sheer mass of an elk and the vehicle speeds, these collisions are very serious and often result in the death of the elk and or motorist.

H. *Protection against and increased ability to suppress forest fires.* This project would facilitate and improve the U.S. Forest Services' access to the forest, allowing for continued resource protection and fire protection/suppression as is necessary.

I. *Reduce unfunded local emergency service costs.* As set forth in subsections A and G above, there are numerous vehicular collisions with injuries on this section of undivided roadway. The first responders to these collisions may be the volunteer fire departments in the vicinity, but often both the Payson Fire Department and the Hellsgate Fire District are dispatched. The costs associated with maintaining the extra personnel and equipment to respond to these accidents is borne by the local tax base, and the cost of responding to the incidents is often borne by the local residents.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT HEREBY RESOLVED:

Section 1. That the Gila County Board of Supervisors supports the completion of the improvements to Highway 260 in the area of Lion Springs, and objects to its removal from ADOT's current Five-Year Program.

Section 2. That Gila County, acting through its appropriate officers and officials, is hereby authorized to take all other actions necessary or appropriate to express its support for completing the improvements.

PASSED AND ADOPTED this 17th day of May 2016, at Globe, Gila County, Arizona.

Attest:

Marian Sheppard, Clerk

GILA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Michael A. Pastor, Chairman

Approved as to form:

Jefferson R. Dalton
Deputy Gila County Attorney
Civil Bureau Chief