



Arizona
**Department of
Transportation**

NEWS

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Doug Nintzel
ADOT Media Relations: (602) 712-7399 or
Trisha White
Defenders of Wildlife: (202) 772-0236

Federal Transportation Bill includes consideration of wildlife in highway planning

While the focus of the recently approved \$286 billion federal transportation bill has been on the funding of highway, transit and other transportation projects, backers of efforts to protect wildlife are also pleased with the legislation.

Arizona is already considered a leader among states addressing the issue of conflicts between traffic and wildlife. In the federal legislation, Congress included provisions for wildlife conservation in transportation planning. President Bush signed the bill last month (August).

Under the new law, transportation planners at all 50 state departments of transportation will consider habitat locations when creating and updating transportation plans.

That is a big step in the right direction, according to Defenders of Wildlife and other wildlife conservation groups.

"For the first time ever, wildlife will be one of the first things considered when building roads, instead of the last," said Trisha White, who directs Defenders of Wildlife's Habitat and Highways Campaign.

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) has voluntarily worked with other agencies and wildlife organizations in recent years to integrate wildlife and other environmental information into its transportation plans and early project development procedures.

"I'm proud of our efforts and our endorsement of the wildlife protection aspects of the federal legislation," said ADOT Director Victor Mendez. "Our experience shows the sooner and more fully environmental concerns, including wildlife corridors, are taken into account in planning, the more likely project delays and unnecessary expenses can be avoided."

ADOT's work to incorporate underpasses for wildlife crossings along State Route 260 between Payson and Heber has received national attention as an example of positive environmental stewardship.