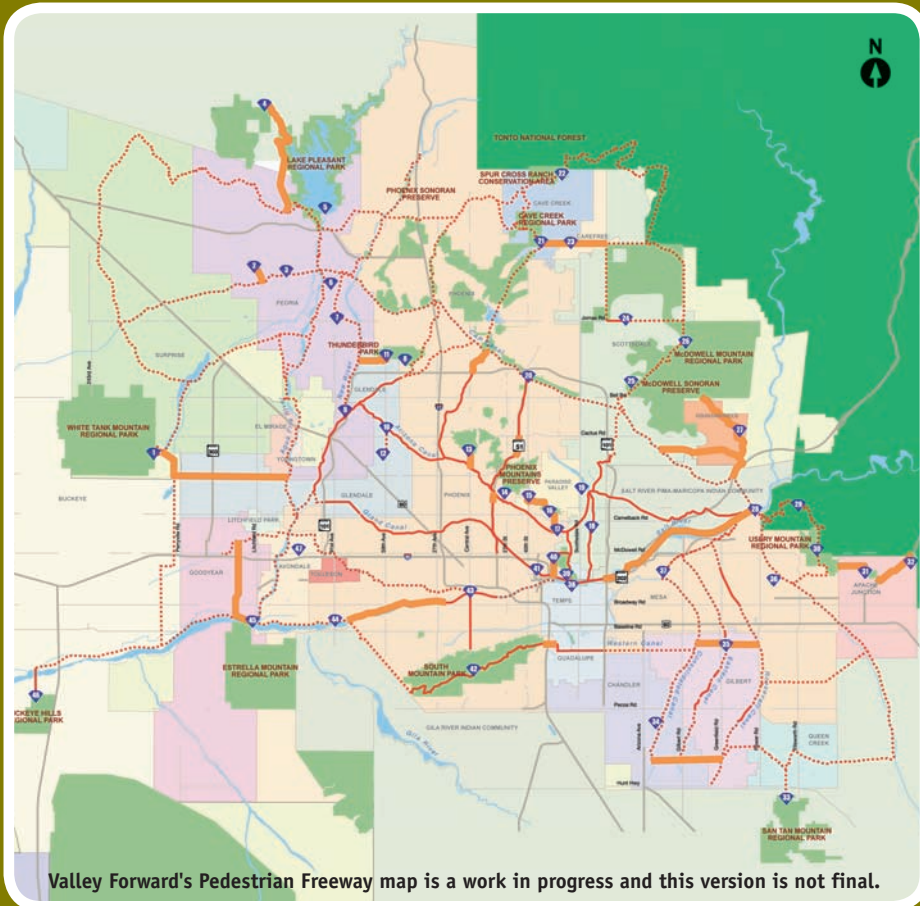


Connecting Communities

Valley Forward launches Pedestrian Freeway



Valley Forward's Pedestrian Freeway map is a work in progress and this version is not final.



Valley Gems

- 1 White Tank Mountain Regional Park
- 2 Saddleback Mountain Open Space
- 3 Vistancia
- 4 Hell's Gate Wilderness Area
- 5 Lake Pleasant Regional Park
- 6 Peoria Regional Park
- 7 West Wing Open Space
- 8 Adobe Mountain Recreation Area
- 9 Rio Vista Park
- 10 Thunderbird Paseo
- 11 Thunderbird Park
- 12 Sahuaro Ranch Park
- 13 North Mountain Preserve
- 14 Piestewa Peak Recreation Area
- 15 Goldwater's Monument
- 16 Camelback Mountain
- 17 Arizona Falls
- 18 Indian Bend Wash Park
- 19 McCormick Stillman Railroad Park
- 20 Reach 11
- 21 Cave Creek Regional Park
- 22 Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area
- 23 Black Mountain Summit Preserve
- 24 Pinnacle Peak Park
- 25 McDowell Sonoran Preserve and Interp. Ctr.
- 26 McDowell Mountain Regional Park
- 27 Fountain Hills Fountain
- 28 Salt River
- 29 Tonto National Forest
- 30 Utery Mountain Regional Park
- 31 Prospector Park
- 32 Lost Dutchman Mine State Park
- 33 San Tan Mountain Regional Park
- 34 Chandler Regional Park
- 35 Riparian Preserve at Water Ranch
- 36 Red Mountain Park
- 37 Park of the Canals
- 38 Tempe Town Lake
- 39 Papago Park
- 40 Papago Park
- 41 Pueblo Grande
- 42 South Mountain Park
- 43 Rio Salado
- 44 Tres Rios
- 45 Estrella Mountain Regional Park
- 46 Buckeye Hills Regional Park
- 47 Friendship ParkValley

After biking in the White Tank Mountains for a couple of hours on a laid-back Saturday morning, you might find yourself wanting to explore new ground and check out trails along the Agua Fria River. But you couldn't—not along a non-motorized trail, anyway.

This is where Valley Forward enters the scene. Its 700 members, representing government entities, private industry and other parties, aggressively work to bring businesses and communities together to promote environmentally sensitive development in the Valley, including the creation of sustainable projects.

"Sustainability is this idea of conserving resources for future generations to insure a better quality of life," says Chris Schmaltz, co-chair of Valley Forward's Land Use/Open Space Committee. He rattles off questions that must be answered, for there to be what he calls, "appropriate growth": How do we get people from home to work? Where do

they live? Do they have amenities close to home and options for work and play that make it a long-term sustainable community, and can quality of life be maintained and improved?

Schmaltz says, "The reason everyone likes to move here is quality of life. How do we sustain that?" He further adds part of the solution is open spaces that benefit residents.

"Open space, like parks and recreation, has always been at the heart of the organization," says Diane Brossart, president of Valley Forward. She mentions the findings of a May 2006 survey conducted by WestGroup Research and commissioned by Valley Forward: three out of five Maricopa County residents feel there is not enough open space

dedicated to recreation in Maricopa County.

Two years ago, Valley Forward identified a problem: Maricopa County cities plan, build and maintain their own trails, many of which do not link together from city to city. The disjoint among communities partly explains why residents have relatively insular lifestyles, which threatens quality of life.

"If people can walk or bike, there's interaction among them they don't get sitting in a car. We're all better when we interact with different people in different contexts outside of our comfort zone," says Schmalz. "We don't get a lot of that when we drive from our driveways to our garage at work and there's not a lot of interaction."

In an effort to strengthen the Valley's existing trail network, Valley Forward has spent the last few years preparing a vision for a regional

"The trails system pays attention to how we utilize land and makes open spaces accessible. If we plan now and preserve open space, the community down the road will benefit in the midst of serious growth."

trails system called "The Valley's Pedestrian Freeway: A Priceless Necklace of Trails and Gems." The project aims to link communities with landmark destinations (such as the Habitat Restoration Project in Phoenix and Tempe Town Lake) via non-motorized trails that promote health and wellness, connectivity among communities and economic development.

The project was initiated with a comprehensive regional trail system map that was incorporated into a poster in 2004. It identifies regional landmarks, existing and planned non-motorized pathways and the gaps among trails and various cities. The second phase of the project includes a trails passport for users to document their hiking experiences. In addition efforts are underway to expand and enhance Valley Forward's Web site using Google Earth technology to provide more information about trails and the regional system.

The Valley's Pedestrian Freeway identifies



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“If people can walk or bike, there’s interaction among them they don’t get sitting in a car. We’re all better when we interact with different people in different contexts outside of our comfort zone.”

places like Papago Park and San Tan Mountain Park as “gems.” The Web site will include photographs of the trails and gems, location of trail head’s and contact information.

This forum for feedback allows the public to better communicate with city officials. “It gives the public a way to say how they want something to happen in their community,” says Chris Bowen, a consultant with DirectClarity LLC in Scottsdale, who designed the system that displays trail data on the Valley Forward Web site.

Valley Forward will promote this ongo-

ing project in partnership with government agencies responsible for developing the trails and will continually update the map as trail status changes.

Schmaltz discusses the bigger picture. “The trails system pays attention to how we utilize land and makes open spaces accessible,” he says. “If we plan now and preserve open space, the community down the road will benefit in the midst of serious growth.”

Despite the unanimous support by all Maricopa County mayors (including a proclamation of support signed by almost all of them)

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2006 Survey of Maricopa County Residents on Land Use

In 2006, Valley Forward hired an independent research firm to survey Maricopa County residents. The purpose was to gauge public awareness and interest in particular issues.

A survey on land usage found many residents do not feel empowered to affect change in their communities, says Diane Brossart, president of Valley Forward. "It's sad people feel un-empowered, and they're really not." It also found the majority of Valley residents do not believe local communities have plans in place to deal effectively with the rapid growth in Maricopa County. They dislike sprawl, but also don't want infill development—two opposite approaches to land use.

So if Maricopa County residents are dissatisfied with the status quo and do not condone sprawl or infill, what do they want? What else is there?

"This tells me people are not educated about land use options. They don't understand high-density, which is sometimes seen as a bad word, but it shouldn't be," Brossart says. "One in three feel they can influence planning in their community. We're going to tell them they can."

for The Valley's Pedestrian Freeway, Brossart admits, "It's a very lofty goal and it'll probably be years to see it come into reality."

"We have pulled in planners to help Valley Forward find gaps," says Brossart. "The next step is to get a plan down and approach city councils and ask, 'How can we support your efforts to make it happen?'" When asked if anyone is not in support of the The Valley's Pedestrian Freeway, Brossart says no.

"Planning departments have been approached. You just need time and money to do it, and you can't do it all at once," she says. "We haven't gotten to a point where we

have great communication between Valley Forward and these communities; we're hoping to open that dialogue even more. We've been working on this behind closed doors for the last couple of years and our goal is to show planning departments how we can be a resource for them."

Valley Forward Chair-elect for 2007 Steve Thompson elaborates, "We have a chance to keep people informed and make sure issues are discussed in a public way. What you get is really good dialogue." **AB**

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