



THE TAOS NEWS

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Traffic study again takes aim at Taos gridlock

By J.R. Logan

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It came as no surprise to a crowd of Taosenos that traffic through the center of town is lousy.

A team of contractors hired by the New Mexico Department of Transportation gave a presentation last Wednesday (Oct. 23) describing the issues that contribute to Taos' gridlock and explaining a study meant to improve traffic flow, and make the road safer for bikes and pedestrians.

Based on a preliminary traffic study done this summer, the team gave all intersections on Paseo del Pueblo between La Posta Road and Camino de la Placita a rating between a D and F on an A-to-F scale during peak travel periods. One of the team members said the ratings could have been worse, but they ran out of letters.

The team found, on average, 22,000 vehicles go north on Paseo near the La Posta intersection. That number is projected to increase to more than 26,000 by 2033.

The current traffic study is the sixth commissioned since 1974. Most of the reports to come out of those studies point to the same general causes of traffic — narrow rights-of-way, dead-end side streets, and abnormal intersections like those at Albright Street and Los Pandos/Siler Road.

In at least two cases, the studies were abandoned because of public opposition. Few residents living off the main drag are eager to see their side streets turned into a bypass, and downtown business owners have repeatedly voiced opposition to redirecting traffic off of Paseo del Pueblo, or even adopting what's been dubbed the "one-way pair," which would put all northbound traffic on Paseo while moving southbound traffic on Placitas.

In 2007, the state completely abandoned the idea of a bypass, noting there wasn't enough through-traffic to justify such a project, and the money to build such a road could take up to 30 years to materialize.

Despite the limited success of previous efforts, David Quintana, an engineer with the Department of Transportation, said the agency was hoping to identify specific projects that could improve traffic flow little by little. He said the first step would be to install a traffic light at the intersection at Albright Street.

Taos County realigned that intersection when completing its new complex two years ago. Melissa Doshier, a spokesperson for the Department of Transportation, said earlier this month funding for that light and another signal at Este Es Road is not yet available.

Quintana said Wednesday that it could be five years before the current study results in tangible, on-the-ground improvements.

At the meeting last week, members of the public offered several concerns and comments ranging from right-of-way issues to a suggestion to look at using roundabouts instead of traffic lights.

A member of the study team noted a possible solution could be to coordinate all of the traffic signals in town to encourage a better traffic flow heading north and south. At the moment, each light works independently of the others, meaning travel can be stop-and-go and lead to major backups at busier intersections.

The team said part of the project is to come up with solutions that fit in with the surrounding community and maintain the “uniqueness” and “historic character” of Taos.

Written comments to be included in the study can be mailed to Eric Johnson, Marron and Associates, 7511 Fourth St. NW, Albuquerque, NM, 87107, call (505) 898-8848, or by email at eric@marroninc.com

On the web

To see a presentation about the ongoing traffic study, or to see a video example of Taos’ quirky traffic patterns, visit taosnews.com .