



THE TAOS NEWS

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Traffic engineers again mull downtown one-way pair

By J.R. Logan

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An ongoing study aimed at relieving traffic congestion in Taos is once again exploring the pros and cons of a long-debated suggestion: the one-way pair.

The idea is to put northbound traffic on Paseo del Pueblo and southbound traffic on Camino de la Placita to resolve gridlock on the historic district.

The primary cause is the bottleneck near the plaza through which nearly all traffic — be it north, south, east or westbound — is forced to travel. To slow things even more, the stoplights in the area are woefully out of date and unsynchronized, meaning traffic bumps along in stops and starts rather than flowing smoothly.

Since the '70s traffic engineers have puzzled over how to improve Taos' troublesome traffic problem, but community opposition from various groups has quashed most attempts at a major fix.

Consultants hired by the New Mexico Department of Transportation are once again reviewing the problem, this time focusing on the stretch of road between the intersection of La Posta Road and Paseo del Pueblo Sur, and Camino de la Placita and Paseo del Pueblo Norte.

That group gave a presentation to a handful of business owners Friday (Dec. 20) to describe how coordinating stoplights or implementing the one-way pair would affect the flow of traffic.

According to computer models used by the engineers, coordinating the stoplights in the study area were updated it would make a modest improvement to traffic overall. With each upgraded light expected to cost about \$200,000, plus improvements to sidewalks and drainage, getting that much done would cost millions and likely take several years.

If the one-way pair would adopted —including the addition of five new stoplights on Camino de la Placita — the group's computer model calculated that traffic would flow much better through most intersections.

But even the suggestion that the one-way pair was a reasonable option raised the hackles of some business owners who've been involved in the traffic debate for decades.

Polly Raye, owner of the John Dunn House Shops, said the one-way pair would make it inconvenient for travelers to get around the historic district. For instance, someone coming from Ranchos who wants to get to the library would have to go several blocks out of the way to get there.

Raye also argued that getting cars moving isn't necessarily what business owners want. They want to make the historic district attractive and easy to visit without rushing them. "Finding the fastest way to get people through our town really isn't our goal," Raye said.

Jerry Davis, owner of Inn on La Loma Plaza, said he advises his guests to avoid the historic district while driving because of the horrendous traffic. "I'm taking them off [Paseo del Pueblo] because of all the problems," Davis said.

The dilemma, as it has been for decades, is finding a way to solve the traffic problem without irking too many people.

The engineering group was quick to point out that it is only reviewing the options and has not yet decided what the best solution may be. The group noted that traffic flow is only one criteria by which solutions will be judged, and sensitivity to the environment and the character of downtown are big considerations.

The Department of Transportation has said the recommendation from the group could lead to projects on the ground, though funding would be years away



Rick Romancito

Holiday traffic in Taos chokes downtown streets Monday afternoon (Dec. 23).