

State seeks comments on Paseo makeover design

By J.R. Logan

The Taos News, 3/31/2016

Officials are planning a major overhaul of Taos' main drag, but the details of exactly what the face-lift will look like are still being hashed out.

An engineering firm hired by the New Mexico Department of Transportation is proposing several ideas for improving the look and function of Paseo del Pueblo Sur between La Posta Road to the north side of the historic district. The firm presented its ideas at a public meeting last month.

To download the entire presentation, find this story at taosnews.com.

Last August, Gov. Susana Martinez announced \$11.3 million in state funding to overhaul more than four miles of Paseo del Pueblo — from State Highway 518 in the south to the northern end of the historic district.

The first phase of that project, extending to La Posta Road, will be relatively straightforward. The state plans to mill down the current road surface and lay new pavement. It also expects to improve drainage systems and add sidewalks and bike lanes.

A spokesperson for the state Department of Transportation said in an email the design for that phase is 90 percent complete. Construction is expected to begin later this year. About \$5 million in funding has been allocated for that stretch.

The more complex phase will go from La Posta northward.

The state says it has found additional funding beyond what the governor announced last year, and it has set aside \$8.5 million for the second phase. However, it's still not clear exactly how far that money will go. The Department of Transportation spokesperson said the extent of the project won't be known until cost estimates are complete.

Much of the cost will be determined by what the final design looks like.

The state has committed to installing a permanent traffic light or traffic circle at the intersection of Paseo and Albright Street, which is something local leaders have sought for years. But there are several other variables that are still not decided.

At the public meeting last month, engineers offered a number of options to consider. Should the corridor between Albright and Los Pados remain as three lanes, with a turning lane in the center? Or should that corridor be extended to four lanes, with two lanes for northbound traffic and two lanes going southbound?

Other challenges will be deciding how to improve intersections that are generally agreed to be awkward or outright dangerous.

For instance, engineers offered a couple ideas to fix the asymmetrical Los Pandos/ Paseo intersection. One option would align Los Pandos to meet Siler Road more directly. The other option, called an “offset double-tee intersection,” would actually move Los Pandos so it meets Paseo farther south.

In a recent public forum on a rezoning plan, Taos Town Manager Rick Bellis presented another schematic showing a traffic circle at the same intersection. The rezoning was shot down by the town council last week, and it’s not clear if such a traffic circle would be possible without having to purchase considerable right of way on the northeast corner of the intersection.

The engineers working on the traffic plan said they plan to bring recommendations and a plan back for input in May. They expect to hold another public meeting in late March or early April.

Design work for the second phase is expected to start in summer 2016. Engineers and representatives of the Department of Transportation said the final design will be decided by the state, but they’re asking for input from local leaders and the public.

Construction on the second phase is slated to start next year.

An engineering firm hired by the New Mexico Department of Transportation is proposing several ideas for improving the look and function of Paseo del Pueblo Sur between La Posta Road to the north side of the historic district.



Images courtesy of New Mexico Department of Transportation/Souder, Miller & Associates

Graphic by J.R. Logan