

Town submits 'wish list' for Paseo road project

By J.R. Logan

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The Taos Town Council has approved a “wish list” of features it would like to see as part of a massive highway reconstruction project through the center of town.

Items on the list include historic-themed lighting through the downtown, sidewalks and bike lanes that are separated from traffic and a roundabout at the intersection of Paseo del Pueblo Sur and Los Pandos Road.

The New Mexico Department of Transportation has pledged about \$13.5 million to overhaul nearly all of Paseo del Pueblo — from the intersection with State Highway 518 near Ranchos de Taos in the south to as far north as the intersection of Paseo del Pueblo Norte and Rivali Lane, near Cid's Food Market.

The first phase of the Paseo project will go from State Highway 518 to La Posta Road and is expected to cost \$5 million. Work on that phase is expected to begin sometime this year.

The second phase, however, is far more complicated and expensive.

The department has \$8.5 million budgeted to reconstruct the highway through downtown. But at a public meeting last week, the engineering firm Souder, Miller & Associates announced its recommendation after a years-long study of that corridor.

The engineers proposed synchronizing all stop lights, widening the road to four lanes between La Posta and Quesnel (while removing the so-called “suicide lane” in the center), installing bike lanes and sidewalks, adding a traffic signal at the intersection of Paseo del Pueblo Sur and Albright Street and realigning asymmetrical intersections at Los Pandos and at the entrance to Taos Pueblo.

The preliminary cost of that work is about \$2.6 million higher than what the state has budgeted.

However, that shortfall didn't stop the Taos Town Council from asking for more Tuesday (May 3).

After several hours of debate, the council unanimously concurred with most of the engineers' recommendations and approved a “wish list” of add-ons to send to the Department of Transportation.

Among the items on the list were:

- Center medians through as much of the project as possible.
- A traffic circle at the intersection of Los Pandos and Paseo del Pueblo Sur.

- A traffic circle at the northern intersection of Camino de la Placita and Paseo del Pueblo.
- Historic-themed street lamps through as much of the downtown area as possible.
- The option for the town to landscape and maintain the center median and roadsides.
- Pedestrian “bump-outs” at all busy crossings.
- Engineering project so that the option of “pair oneway” streets through downtown could be a viable option in the future.

Most of the debate among the council Tuesday was over the merits of the one-way pair option. For decades, traffic engineers have suggested Paseo del Pueblo be converted to two lanes of one-way traffic from Quesnel Street in the south to the northern intersection with Camino de la Placita. Southbound traffic would then flow along Camino de la Placita.

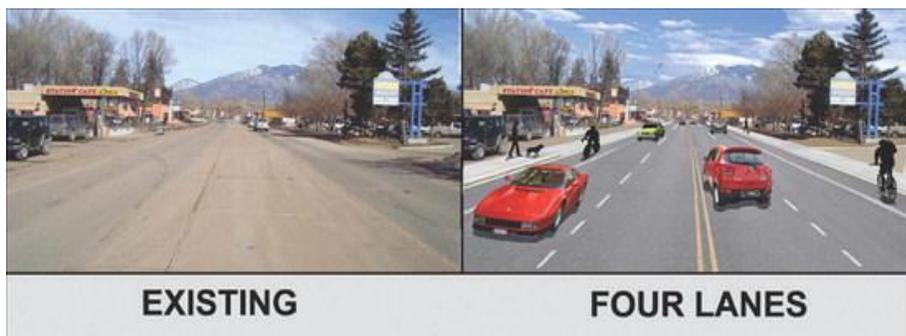
Previous studies have had mixed reviews on the one-way pair proposal, but Souder-Miller found the option would be the best way to reduce congestion in the downtown. However, it’s also the most expensive and by far the most controversial option.

Councilors ultimately asked that the option not be ruled out and that the project be designed so it might one day dovetail into the one-way pair option. However, the council also noted that it was not endorsing the one-way pair and any decision to implement it would only come after substantial public comment.

Regardless of what appears in the “wish list,” the state Department of Transportation will ultimately decide what the project will look like. It’s also not yet clear whether the department will end up cutting certain elements from the engineers’ proposal in order to make the project fit the current budget, or if it will seek out additional funding.

When asked how much influence local government has on the project design, a spokesperson for the department said in an email they “are still accepting public comment and will welcome any comments the town or any other elected official would like to submit.”

“We take all comments into consideration and they become part of the project record,” the spokesperson wrote.



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