



THE TAOS NEWS

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NMDOT taking last step toward approval, denial of U.S. 64

By Patricia Chambers

The Taos News

Representatives of the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) returned to Taos for a third public meeting April 24 on the proposed reconstruction of U.S. 64/NM 68 (Kit Carson Road).

Philip Gallegos, assistant District 5 engineer for NMDOT, said the state agency addressed concerns presented at an earlier meeting by business owners and residents about the loss of about seven curbside parking spaces and disruption of their businesses during construction.

Three serious accidents occurred on the roadway from 2005 to 2007, killing two people and causing damage to art galleries.

The NMDOT proposed a reconstruction of the road that would slow traffic speed after the 2007 accident that killed a couple walking along the road.

The Kit Carson intersection at Paseo del Pueblo Sur is listed in the top 5 percent of the worst crash areas in the state, according to NMDOT officials.

Residents and business owners have told the NMDOT that the problem begins at the intersection of Quesnel Street and Kit Carson Road, because many drivers do not slow down for the transition into the residential zone.

The town of Taos obtained permission from the state department of transportation to install a four-way stop sign at Quesnel and Kit Carson after the last accident. Construction was to have started on a portion of the road that leads toward Paseo del Ca-òn by fall 2008, but objections from business owners at a November 2007 meeting led to a delay of the project.

The state has proposed four options for reconstruction of the roadway from the Taos Plaza intersection to Mariposa Place, Gallegos said.

The first option would include sidewalks that conform to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); bicycle paths and curbside parking would be eliminated

on both sides of the roadway, Gallegos said. The plan would allow loading zones on both sides of the street.

The second option would only place ADA-compliant sidewalks on the southside of the street; no bicycle paths would be installed.

The third option would place ADA sidewalks on the on the southside and widen the road on the northside. It would allow parking on the northside.

The final option is to do nothing, Gallegos said.

The public has until May 9 to submit formal comments on the proposals to the NMDOT. Responses can be sent by email at bmartinez@gfnet.com or by FAX at (505) 820-7109.

Gallegos said the project would also need approval from the state historic preservation office, but the NMDOT decides to go forward, construction would begin by spring 2009.

Recommendations for “traffic calming” features, such as an island near the intersection of Kit Carson Road and Quesnel Street would likely be included in the final plan for option 1, Gallegos said. The state department representative also told the group of about 25 residents attending the meeting that crews could be instructed to work primarily at night to limit effects of the construction on the businesses.

Councilor Rudy Abeyta, who attended the April 24 meeting, said he supports the first option because it fits into the town’s plan to bring sidewalks in the downtown area into ADA-compliance and make the area safer for pedestrians and vehicles.

“The state has appropriated the money to do this,” Abeyta said. “If it is not done in the next fiscal year, it will go away and we probably won’t be able to fix it for a long time.”

The transportation department has allocated about \$600,000 for the project.

Councilor Amy Quintana said the first option would be the best plan to increase pedestrian traffic on the street and thereby, increase business for the merchants.

She agreed with Abeyta that using state and federal financing for the project is best for the town’s economy. “This will help the merchants. The economy has been bad everywhere, but it’s been really tough in Taos,” she said.

Quintana said she feels the island features at Quesnel Street are very important to the plan.

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