



THE TAOS NEWS

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Town delays approval on Kit Carson Road reconstruction

By Patricia Chambers

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The Taos Town Council responded Tuesday (May 20) to opposition by property owners for the state transportation department's plan to reconstruct Kit Carson Road (U.S. 64) by delaying approval of the roadway's full reconstruction

Rick Padilla, New Mexico Department of Transportation project manager, said Wednesday (May 21) he had no information on the council's action on the request to accept Option 1.

The full reconstruction of the road that meets Paseo del Pueblo Sur at the Taos Plaza intersection would eliminate curbside parking on the road. The plan would essentially narrow the traffic lane, incorporate bicycle paths and cut ADA entrances into the sidewalk for wheelchair accessibility.

Two alternate plans would bring sidewalks on one or the other side of the road into full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and remove several curbside parking spots. Option 4 would be a "no build."

NMDOT was asked to study the road last year after a series of serious accidents on Kit Carson Road that began in 2005. One art gallery was damaged twice by car crashes and a third accident broke a hole in another gallery. Two men died in that crash.

Not long after the fatal crash, two pedestrians were killed in 2007 after being struck by a car as they walked along the side of the roadway.

The town has installed a new stop sign at Quesnel Street and rumble strips to slow traffic on the road.

Former town Mayor Fred Peralta said Kit Carson Road was improved by NMDOT about 1995 and a compromise was reached to maintain seven parking spaces and two loading zones.

The real problem is the road has several "natural bottlenecks," Peralta said and he believes the state engineers simply want to straighten the road.

Like Peralta, property owners do not think NMDOT is addressing the real problem on the street.

Rena Rosequist, owner of Mission Gallery, lives behind the gallery and has firsthand knowledge of the car accidents. “We first thought DOT would find a way to slow traffic coming from (Paseo del) Canòn when we asked them to study the problem,” she said.

“Imagine our surprise when they came up with the plan for sidewalk beautification,” Rosequist said. “The DOT plan doesn’t address our concerns.”

“I guarantee that without curbside parking Kit Carson Road will turn into a little ghost town,” she said.

Property owner Benton Bond said parking in front of his buildings on the north side of the road is part of the tradition. “Those buildings were built in 1856 and there has always been parking in front of it,” Bond said.

“We would lose the historical flavor of Taos” if curbside parking was eliminated, said Councilor Eugene Sánchez.

Councilor Darren Còrdova wondered why the resolution presented Tuesday supported Option 1 and asked Town Public Works Director Francisco “French” Espinoza to contact NMDOT to present a report to the council explaining why engineers support the full reconstruction of the road despite objections from property owners.

Approval of the resolution was tabled until the NMDOT report is presented.