

City council discusses area transportation safety plan

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
Friday, 23 August 2019 03:07



In an effort to address high area fatality and serious injury rates, the City of Gallup was chosen as the subject of a traffic and pedestrian safety analysis and plan, which was presented to the Gallup City Council at its regular meeting Aug. 13.

Rosa Kozub, government-to-government unit supervisor for the New Mexico Department of Transportation, said the department has been working on the safety plan with City of Gallup staff, the public works planning department, and the public safety department since May 2018.

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“The plan emphasizes priority for fatality and serious injury incidents,” Kozub said.

The vision of the plan is to make Gallup a safer place for residents and visitors to walk, bicycle, and drive.

The plan has four goals:

to reduce the potential for vehicle/vehicle, vehicle/pedestrian and vehicle/bicycle fatality and serious injury incidents;

enhance the common understanding of need for roadway safety improvement in Gallup;

partner with safety practitioners within and outside of the Gallup community to enhance roadway safety;

and evaluate opportunities to enhance roadway safety with all infrastructure projects.

Jim Townsend, of Wilson and Company, the project team, said public input was sought through four outlets.

“We tried to create a very open, transparent environment to gain input from stakeholders, and those who know [the] community best,” Townsend said.

The team first spoke with stakeholders who are part of the planning group, including staff from the City of Gallup, the Gallup-McKinley County Chamber of Commerce, the Northwest New Mexico Council of Governments, the McKinley County Sheriff’s Department, the New Mexico

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Department of Transportation, and the New Mexico Department of Health.

Then, the survey asked members of the community to identify issues with traffic and pedestrian routes. Townsend said they received 38 survey responses.

The project team also provided information brochures about what the safety plan entails.

Then there was a series of open houses and workshops in public spaces, where community members could hear about the safety plan.

Based on the data they obtained and analyzed, Townsend said six focus areas were identified based on roadway types and crash trends.

The focus areas included a stretch of Highway 118 from Allison Road to Interstate 40; the stretch on Highway 491 from Interstate 40 to Ninth Street; Maloney Avenue; and three sections of Interstate 40 near the east and west exits of Highway 118 and Highway 491.

With these areas identified, Townsend said they can start to conduct in-depth location studies to obtain more specific data.

These new studies are called Phase A/B Location Studies, and include eight phases: develop a purpose and need statement, a technical/engineering review, public review and stakeholder coordination, alternatives analysis, recommended concept for design, environmental review, detailed analysis, and a cost estimate development.

The priorities of the studies will be to find out how to deter pedestrians from Interstate 40 through a road safety audit, and address the hotspots of the Highway 66 corridor and the Interstate 40 and U.S. Highway 491 interchange through the Phase A/B Location Studies.

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Kozub said the next step is to conduct the studies described to the city council while the council gives support and helps by raising internal awareness and taking action to improve transportation safety.

Mayor Jackie McKinney said the issues laid out by NMDOT are similar to those he personally has encountered at the Miyamura Overpass near Highway 66, along with drivers exiting Interstate 40, only to get stuck on Maloney Avenue.

“There have been safety studies done lately, and there’s potential there,” McKinney said. “We’re going to do this. You brought up critical needs for our community.”

McKinney said the city council would support the NMDOT studies, but also expressed a desire for the council to be included in more of the department’s future meetings to offer feedback and perspective.

“You’re talking to people who’ve been raised here. We’ve had these issues ourselves,” he said.

The city council approved the area transportation safety plan with a 5-0-0 vote.

By Cody Begaye
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