

City Council to look into \$21 million autonomous truck testing hub

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent
Friday, 17 December 2021 06:41



Self-driving cars may still seem like something out of a long-ago sitcom like “The Jetsons,” but as they become more and more of a reality, the City of Gallup is looking to invest.

In March, Deputy Director of the Gallup Economic Development Corporation Michael Sage, gave a presentation about House Bill 270 to the Gallup City Council. HB 270 would align New Mexico with other states in the autonomous car domain. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has put guidelines regarding the new technology in place for state and local governments.

Sage also talked to the McKinley County Commissioners about using Gallup as a testing center for autonomous cars. He suggested creating a mobility hub – a center where the vehicles could be tested.

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Now, the project is becoming more than just an idea.

Representatives from Global Logistics Development Partners, an independent international investment advisory firm based in Scottsdale, Ariz., that studies increased market share and revenue for air cargo, seaport cargo, and inland port cargo, appeared before the council during its Dec. 7 special meeting to explain how the mobility hub would work and what would be required to construct it.

GLDPartners' Managing Partner Adam Wasserman, explained that the autonomous vehicle industry has really blown up in the past couple of years.

"There's dozens of projects being announced because the automotive industry and the transportation world is literally being redefined right now in over a very few number of years," Wasserman said.

Wasserman and Sage stated that Gallup would be a great location for the mobility hub because of its proximity to Interstate-40 and the railroad. Wasserman noted that the area could entice companies from Silicon Valley, Detroit, or even locations outside the U. S. to do their testing in Gallup. He painted a picture where a company would visit for two to three weeks to do their testing, and then be followed by another company.

Wasserman said these companies would pay thousands of dollars a day to use the facility.

The testing and development complex would focus on autonomous trucks rather than autonomous cars. Wasserman said the project would cost about \$21 million and require about 100 acres of land. Other requirements include proximity to the interstate, a flat site, access to utilities, and the ability to hold a 1.5 mile-long straightaway on which the trucks would be tested.

The project would also include a truck mobility complex.

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The truck mobility complex would take \$5 million of the \$21 million total, and it would be about 100 acres in size.

“We’re proposing a small facility be built somewhere near I-40 that can be a place where those trucks are charged ... and they can upload data from their testing on the road on the way to Albuquerque and in the other direction to Los Angeles,” Wasserman explained.

Lois Yates, who leads Economic Development and Aviation Practice at GLDPartners, talked about how this facility would benefit Gallup.

“This is going to give Gallup and New Mexico an opportunity to compete in an arena they’ve not competed in before,” Yates said. “The western part of the United States has not been a part of the auto world or the truck world, and this is an opportunity to play a role in that.”

Sage previously said the Gallup Municipal Airport would be a possible location for the hub, but Wasserman told the council he does not see that as an option.

He asked the council to finalize a different site for the testing complex within 30 days.

Once a site is located, the city can ask for state funding for the project. Wasserman said that if they follow his proposed timeline, construction could be finished by as early as the beginning of 2023.

Mayor Louis Bonaguidi said that city staff had been considering potential locations.

He asked Wasserman about the importance of the 1.5-mile straightaway. Wasserman said that part of the project would be fundamental.

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Councilor Fran Palochak, Dist. 4, acknowledged the difficulty of the project, while also showing her support.

“It’s a very ambitious project and certainly it’s cutting-edge and possibly doable,” Palochak said. “It looks like time is of the essence to get the edge on everybody else ... provided we get the funding.”

Bonaguidi thanked Wasserman and Yates for attending the council’s special meeting.

“We appreciate the time you’ve put [into this] and hopefully we get back to you with something positive shortly,” he concluded.

Public safety building

The council also approved the use of Gross Receipts Tax bonds to fund the new public safety building and other city projects. The amount comes to just over \$12.8 million.

Gallup’s Chief Financial Officer Patty Holland informed the council that \$500,000 of that amount would go toward returfing fields in the city. Another \$500,000 will be spent on resurfacing streets.

The remaining amount, which is almost \$11.9 million, will be for the new public safety building.

The council approved the budget adjustment.

Parks and Recreation fees

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The City Council also held a work session earlier on Dec. 7 to discuss the new Parks and Recreation fees.

The department's fees and policies had been reviewed or adjusted since May 2006, so Director Vincent Alonzo appeared before the board to present the new proposed fees and policies. The proposed fees and policies can be found at <https://www.gallupnm.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Item/2649?fileID=12350>

During Alonzo's presentation, Palochak voiced her concern about the lack of staff at the Harold Runnels Athletic Complex. Alonzo had explained that the complex only has one full-time recreational coordinator and three part-time workers.

"I kind of don't like that you don't have two people at the same time, because that's a safety thing," Palochak pointed out. "I would like to see two [people] working at that facility when they're open."

City Manager Maryann Ustick said city staff would have to look into the budget to see if having two people on duty at the same time would be possible.

Alonzo noted that he would like to implement the new fees and policies beginning on Jan. 1.

He asked the councilors to put the item on the Dec. 14 meeting agenda. The council agreed.

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