

Gallup Express, BID contemplate route change

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Official: Complaints coming in about ‘hangers on’

There have been intoxicated people hanging around the Gallup Express bus stop on Aztec Avenue near Camille’s Sidewalk Café, and downtown property owners don’t like it. Moreover, bus riders who frequently take the bus downtown believe safety is important.

This was the topic of a July 21 meeting between the Business Improvement District and Tommy Mims, the executive director at Gallup Express, which operates under the auspices of the Gallup Community Pantry. Mims and BID agreed to meet at a later date to iron out either a relocated bus stop or increased safety measures.

“We don’t have a problem moving the actual bus stop,” Mims told the Sun this week. “But are we really getting rid of the problem if we move the stop? When you move a bus stop, you impact the lives of people along the lines of safety and convenience. Plus, let’s say you move it down the street or something? These same people sitting and hanging out will most likely hang out at the new location, too.”

Louis Bonaguidi, owner of City Electric Shoe Shop on Coal Avenue and chairman of the BID board of directors, said as soon as bus riders get off at the Gallup Express stop in front of Camille’s, they are often met by a throng of intoxicated vagrants who sometimes panhandle. That deters people from wanting to go to Camille’s, as well other businesses in the downtown area, Bonaguidi said.

The main bus stop in question is on the south side of Aztec and within walking distance of the downtown walkway, itself a popular spot for drinking during the day and evening hours.

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Bonaguidi said tourists don't want to see that kind of negativity downtown – particularly within the Business Improvement District.

"It's not something that is new to Gallup," Bonaguidi said of the problem. "But I, and others, are noticing more of it lately."

Is moving the bus stop the solution?

C.B. Strain, planning and zoning director at the city, attended the July 21 BID board meeting. He said the city, which is a funding agent for the district, can't erect a concrete bus stop on private land, which limits relocation efforts. Those attending the meeting suggested moving the stop in question further west and between Second and Third streets near Lowe's grocery store.

"Building codes and zoning laws have to be considered in a situation like that," Strain said. "The city adopts building codes of the state."

Francis Bee, executive director at BID, said the people sitting around might mean well, but drinking and panhandling obstruct business.

"I think moving the stop is where we are on everything," she said. "There are a few moving parts to this, but I think the situation can be resolved."

Mims said the downtown bus route is popular and the stop in front of Camille's is a major transfer point. He said Gallup Express had more than 100,000 riders in 2015, and he predicted that number would be even bigger at the end of 2016.

"Ridership is growing," Mims said. "Again, a lot of people utilize our services."

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Established in 2009, the BID is a 35-block radius that includes art galleries, restaurants, trade shops, and retail establishments. The property owners within the district pay a special tax or fee based on a 2006 McKinley County property assessment. The district encompasses parts of Historic Highway 66 and Coal and Aztec avenues, and is one of two such areas in New Mexico. The state's other BID is in Albuquerque.

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