

**ROUNDAABOUT: Safety is top benefit of roundabout**

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knowledge, an unprecedented amount of one-on-one, very detailed outreach,” said City Manager Andrew Gorayeb. “They’ve done an unbelievable job on this.”

The Sisters community, in a detailed public process, chose back in 2011 to pursue a roundabout as the preferred traffic-control measure at the Barclay/Highway 20 intersection. Since then, ODOT has been pursuing that route. A key element of determining the viability of a roundabout at that location was buy-in from the state’s freight industry. On-the-ground tests of a mock roundabout layout earned that buy-in and ODOT is prepared to move forward as soon as the City of Sisters signs an intergovernmental agreement to launch the project.

Farnsworth told *The Nugget* that he is no evangelist for roundabouts; in fact, he was originally agnostic as to what traffic-control method was to be used at the intersection. But he’s now convinced that the roundabout is the way to go.

“I have come to understand

that this is a viable and probably a preferable option,” he said.

And Sisters isn’t really a guinea pig; roundabouts are increasingly being installed across the U.S., as noted in a story in *The New York Times* on July 30.

“Once seen only in countries like France and Britain, the roundabout, favored by traffic engineers because it cuts congestion and reduces collisions and deaths, is experiencing rapid growth in the United States,” the story notes. *(A link to the story may be found with the online version of this story at [www.nuggetnews.com](http://www.nuggetnews.com).)*

The key element is safety. National and international statistics show fewer accidents at roundabouts and a significantly lower level of severity due to slower speeds and eliminating head-on collisions and T-bone accidents. And that goes for pedestrians and cyclists as well as autos.

According to ODOT’s research, “when signalized intersections are converted to roundabouts, there is a 48 percent reduction in crashes, and 78 percent reduction in crashes resulting in at least an injury. This is because overall speeds are drastically reduced, and there are many less ‘conflict points’ (for all modes), with roundabouts.”

Farnsworth acknowledged that some in Sisters have concerns that a roundabout will be a new mode for many drivers, especially some of the older folks who live nearby and use that intersection. A number of those drivers are very comfortable with a traffic signal (like the temporary signal that was up during Cascade Avenue construction) and would just as soon see a traffic light in place.

That concern, Farnsworth said, is one reason why ODOT has determined to keep the roundabout at one lane so as to make it as easy to navigate as possible. He also believes that drivers will appreciate the reductions in speed at the intersection.

“That fear and that concern are real,” he said, “but (research is) emphasizing the fact that roundabouts are extremely effective at getting people to slow down.”

Farnsworth notes that no one is arguing that a signal is a terrible idea or that a roundabout is a magic solution to all of Sisters’ traffic problems.

“This isn’t about one is absolutely bad and one is absolutely good,” he said.

Summer holiday weekends often see traffic stacking up, sometimes out to Tollgate and beyond in the eastbound lane and on Sundays westbound

traffic backs up well to the east of town. A traffic signal and a roundabout are about equal in terms of their effectiveness at moving traffic — and both are better than a stop sign. Neither will alleviate traffic stacking that, so far this summer, has also been evident on regular weekdays.

“It’s not a complete fix, but it’s better than the stop control we have now,” Farnsworth said.

And a roundabout is not a fix to other problems. Farnsworth acknowledged that he’s received many queries as to why there is a project in the works for Barclay/Highway 20 when Locust and Highway 20 is at least as problematic an intersection (though Barclay has seen more accidents).

The Locust/Hwy. 20 is, indeed a problematic intersection. Anyone who has waited there to make an eastbound left-hand turn onto the highway can tell you that. It’s also an extremely complicated intersection to “fix.” Highway 126 merges into it and there is an entrance/exit to FivePine and the Creekside Campground just down the road, along with the entrance to the mobile-home park.

That intersection just isn’t going to get fixed anytime soon.

The Locust/20

intersection is going to be much more expensive, much more complicated, much more challenging than Barclay/20,” Farnsworth said.

To deal with traffic stacking, traffic through town and the problem of the Locust/20 intersection, the City of Sisters and ODOT are going to have to work harder at traffic management, Farnsworth believes.

“We need something different than just adding infrastructure to help manage the dynamics we have in this environment,” he said.

Gorayeb agrees.

“We need to be more proactive about managing traffic instead of just watching it go by,” he said.

Cost of infrastructure is another question that frequently arises. Many assume that a signal would be both cheaper and have a much smaller footprint. Yet, according to ODOT, the footprint and the bill are pretty close to equal. A signal would require a very long left turn lane to accommodate all that stacking, which expands the footprint.

ODOT does not have a current estimate on a signal’s cost, because they have been pursuing the roundabout as requested by the City in 2011.

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