

Public can weigh in on proposed roundabouts

By Sue Stafford
Correspondent

Drivers in Sisters may navigate two or three more roundabouts in the future, according to proposed refinements to the 2010 Sisters Transportation System Plan (TSP).

Citizens have until December 15 to provide feedback on the proposed refinements.

A standing-room-only crowd filled Sisters City Council chambers last week to view the proposed options and hear Matt Kittleson of Kittleson & Associates, transportation engineering and planning firm, explain the refinements. Kittleson was joined by Paul Bertagna, Public Works director and representatives of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

The proposed refinements are all aimed at addressing traffic circulation on the east side of town, which was identified in 2010 as an area needing improvements. The specific areas identified are the junction of Highway 20/126, including the intersection with Buckaroo Trail in the FivePine development, and the intersection of Highway 20/Locust Street near the elementary school. Bike and pedestrian traffic is part of the consideration (*see sidebar story on page 23*).

Feedback from the citizens will help finalize the revised concepts that will be incorporated into the TSP and presented to the City Council for final approval. This week

is the public's opportunity to weigh in. The PowerPoint presentation made by Kittleson and comment forms can be found on the City website (www.ci.sisters.or.us) with links to both. Forms are also available at City Hall.

Those who attended the open house and picked up comment forms can drop them off at City Hall or email them to Nicole Abbenhuis, Public Works operations coordinator, at nabbenhuis@ci.sisters.or.us. The deadline for comments is end of business day on Friday, December 15. For questions, contact Abbenhuis at 541-323-5220.

The largest roundabout — probably larger than the current one at Highway 20/Barclay Drive — is proposed for Highway 20/126 and Buckaroo Trail. The concept drawing locates its placement in the currently treed triangle of land owned by the Oregon State Parks and Recreation (OSPR) department, with the Highway 126 arm swinging into the OSPR property on the north side of the highway, which would necessitate tree removal. Buckaroo Trail would form the southern arm of the roundabout. The truck scales would remain in its current location.

Kittleson purported this roundabout would provide significant traffic circulation improvements and safety benefits, including reduction of vehicle speeds and better bicycle and pedestrian access. By building it within the triangle and off the current highway, there would be less

impact on traffic during construction. Some rights-of-way would need to be attained; a majority of the necessary property is owned by OSPR.

The bridge on Highway 20 over Whychus Creek would have two travel lanes with pedestrian/bike paths on either side. Jefferson Street would possibly be a right in, right out only at the intersection with Highway 20.

The largest hurdle for this project, which has a three-to-five-year timeframe, is finding sufficient funding sources. Installation of the roundabout would markedly change the look of the currently forested southern and eastern portals into town. It is designed to address the travel demands expected by the year 2030.

The congested Highway 20/Locust intersection has both short-term and long-term options proposed. In the short-term (one to three years), the idea is to find a low-cost solution that could be built quickly, requiring no acquisition of rights-of-way or major reconstruction. It would function like a roundabout by helping vehicles enter into traffic safely, slow vehicles down on their way into and out of town, and help pedestrians cross safely in the crosswalks to already developed property.

The Highway 20/Locust small roundabout would be



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

A large roundabout may be built on the triangle of land near the current junction of Highway 20 and Highway 126.

“mountable,” meaning trucks’ rear tires would be able to drive over the center, aiding their travel through the roundabout. The mountable roundabout would be the first of its kind in Oregon; they are currently used on the Washington state highway system.

The small roundabout provides a low-cost improvement that would improve mobility and safety and yet doesn’t preclude one of the three long-term options, each of which have a 10-plus-year time-frame and some trade-offs.

Option one would be built as close to the middle of the present intersection as possible, providing for small right-of-way needs. However, some of the tight turns could prove challenging for trucks.

Option two provides for

the roundabout to be “squared up” and built off the highway on Locust, allowing for highway 20 traffic to continue through the intersection during construction. The tradeoff is the need for greater right-of-way acquisition, which increases the time and cost of the project.

Option three changes the shape of the roundabout, which addresses the turning limitations of option one but its larger size might increase the costs.

The timeframes on these projects are only estimates because finding the necessary funding will determine if and when a project could be built. Citizen feedback will also influence the projects. Comments must be submitted by December 15 to be considered.

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