

Unser and Paseo del Norte Project Improves Roadways and Creates Major Job Center

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With any great project there will always be misconceptions, especially when the project challenges the previous pattern of development over the past few decades. The Unser Boulevard and Paseo del Norte project, known as the Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan (VHSDP), is critical to the future of our city and deserves careful consideration of all the facts.

Surrounding the intersection of these two vital regional roadways, we have the opportunity to create an employment center on the West Side similar to ABQ Uptown or the Journal Center that will improve the jobs-to-housing imbalance, with a projected 5,500 jobs, and reduce general congestion on our roadways by providing additional connectivity, opportunities for transit and less commuter traffic. This planning effort respects the primary commuter purpose of these roads in a way that is still consistent with major infrastructure projects that have been completed over the past four years on the West Side and similar to what we've been able to do with the completed Unser Extension, multiple road widenings, funding of the Paseo del Norte and I-25 interchange, and planning and right-away acquisition for the limited-access Paseo Del Volcan loop roadway.

Long-range traffic studies reveal catastrophic gridlock on West Side roads and river crossings by 2035 if we don't complete these projects and planning efforts. The VHSDP is a critical component to reducing congestion on the West Side. We can and need to create a mixed-use district that will allow for additional jobs and help reduce congestion on river crossings. We can and need to require a grid of streets to serve new development and help reduce dependency on Unser and Paseo del Norte by providing alternate routes. By adding traffic lanes, changing our land-use pattern, and focusing on mass transit, we can powerfully change our fate on the West Side.

The VHSDP includes 570 acres of private land surrounding the Unser and Paseo del Norte intersection. Without guidance, this land will likely develop as single-family homes, compounding the problem of crippling traffic on Paseo del Norte, Unser Boulevard, and our river crossings. The proposed development at Unser and Paseo del Norte offers additional traffic benefits such as: support for transit service with walkable development; additional streets to increase the connectivity on the west side; reduced vehicle miles traveled from compact, mixed-use development; and fewer commuters crossing the river due to additional jobs on the West Side.

As a community, we all want well-planned areas that will encourage positive growth and job creation for the metropolitan region. Together, we have embarked on an unprecedented 4-year journey to plan for and guide good development in the Volcano Mesa area atop the Northwest Mesa in partnership with property owners, neighbors, the National Park Service and other stakeholders. If we work together, we can thoughtfully allow more access along Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard that will enable this potential employment center to thrive.

Instead of waiting to react to the problem once it's beyond improvement, we are proud to lead the way in taking positive steps to proactively plan for future development on Albuquerque's West Side that offers a new choice for residents and businesses. We believe this positive effect will set the trend for our neighbors in Rio Rancho and Bernalillo and Sandoval Counties. We care deeply about this region and will continue to lead in visionary initiatives that will change our future for the better.