

Note: Below is the Citizens Committee Recommendation for restriping the Montano Corridor. This is the pre-signed file. For signed copies please contact the Office of Council Services.

November 2, 2005

Brad Winter, President Albuquerque City Council,

All City Councilors

Montano Corridor Technical Committee

Laura J. Mason, Director, Albuquerque City Council

City of Albuquerque,
City Council
Albuquerque/Bernalillo County
Government Center
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P.O. Box 1293
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Re: Montano Citizens Advisory Committee, Comment on Montano Road Corridor Reports from Wilson & Company and Hall Planning and Engineering, Inc.

Councilor Winter, City Councilors, Technical Committee Members, Ms. Mason:

The Montano Advisory Committee was formed to provide non-technical citizen input to the planning and engineering firms advising the City of Albuquerque on alternatives to configuring Montano Road between Coors Road and Second Street. Members were appointed by City Councilors Michael Cadigan and Debbie O'Malley to create a group with diverse backgrounds living on both sides of the river. Each Councilor appointed three residents and three business persons from their respective districts. As time proceeded a core group of two people from the West Side and four people from the North Valley attended the meetings. During the process the Citizens Committee provided input and ideas to the engineers and planners about the issues experienced by commuters who drive across the bridge and those experienced by residents residing along the corridor.

The Committee members' consensus is that the goal of the Montano Corridor is to utilize the river crossing as efficiently as possible in moving traffic back and forth while at the same time minimizing negative impacts on the areas that it crosses. It is the members' consensus that the recommendations that follow will best achieve that goal. The

Committee requests that the recommendations, if adopted, be codified into a City ordinance.

Recommendations

- Configure Montano between Coors Road and Fourth Street to four lanes – two general-purpose and two high-occupancy-vehicle (HOV); the HOV lanes should be on the outside. (Reconfiguration is contingent upon obtaining the necessary approvals from the Army Corps of Engineers, the New Mexico State Preservation Office, and the Mid-Region Council of Governments so that the entire segment between Coors and Fourth is reconfigured, including the bridge across the Rio Grande.)
- Extend the HOV lanes the entire length of Montano between Coors and I-25; and develop a comprehensive, City-wide plan for HOV lanes that links the Montano HOV lanes with connecting HOV lanes elsewhere.
- Reduce the speed limit on Montano between Fourth Street and Coors.
- Commit sufficient resources and resolve for vigorous enforcement of the HOV lanes and the speed limit; consider the use of a camera-based system and automated speed control devices.
- Redesign the intersection of Fourth Street and Montano, and the traffic flow on Fourth Street, to decrease the congestion for northbound and southbound traffic on Fourth Street as well as for eastbound and westbound traffic on Montano.
- Incorporate the use of roundabouts at the Fourth and Montano intersection, and at intermediate points on Montano between Coors and Fourth, such as the Rancho Caballero light.
- Create safe pedestrian/bicycle/equestrian crossings on Montano at major crossing points, including ditches, trails, and entering streets. Include barrier-protected islands in the median to protect pedestrians and to provide a haven while waiting for the next crossing opportunity. At selected locations grade-separated trail crossings should be added. The Committee understands that there are recommendations in the *AASHTO Guide for the Planning, Design & Operation of Pedestrian Facilities*; compliance with the “best practices” recommendations is preferred.
- Retain the existing bicycle lanes; but separate them from automobile traffic with curbing or other physical barrier.
- Implement a “rapid bus service” along the entire length of the Montano/Montgomery corridor that is at least as effective, fast and efficient as the Rapid Ride system recently implemented along Central Avenue. Include a transit stop and train station on Montano for the new commuter rail system currently being developed. Provide park-and-ride facilities on the west side of the City and elsewhere to ensure success.
- Integrate Intelligent Transportation Systems throughout the corridor to manage the flow of traffic and access to the corridor.
- Begin limiting access to the corridor by re-directing streets and driveways where possible.

Discussion

The Committee reviewed the report of October 14, 2005, submitted by Wilson & Company (Wilson) and the report of October 17, 2005, submitted by Hall Planning and Engineering, Inc. (Hall). The Committee also reviewed a draft of the Wilson report which was prepared approximately two weeks before the final report was issued. Additionally, Committee members met on a number of occasions with Hall and Wilson representatives, both in person and by conference call. All of the information developed by the traffic engineers has been helpful in analyzing how to meet the goals of moving traffic efficiently across the Rio Grande while at the same time minimizing negative impacts on the areas traversed by Montano Road, maintaining the ditch and trail systems, and increasing walkability in the area.

HOV Lanes. The most striking findings of each of the two reports is that the intersection of Fourth Street and Montano, while not currently at capacity for traffic moving east and west along Montano, is near capacity during rush hour periods. Adding two more general-purpose lanes will exceed the capacity of that intersection.

Rick Hall, principal of Hall Planning and Engineering, Inc., said during public meetings held earlier this year that the theoretical capacity of the Fourth Street and Montano intersection for east/west traffic is 2160 vehicles per hour. Wilson, in its report, indicates that the actual capacity is slightly less, at 2,101 vehicles per hour. Wilson notes that the current peak usage on Montano between Fourth Street and Coors Road is approximately 1600 vehicles per hour. Wilson also reports that approximately 17% of the vehicles traveling on this segment carry two or more people. During periods of peak usage that is roughly 275 vehicles per hour.

Adding an HOV lane each direction will presumably move those 275 vehicles each hour to that lane, freeing space for an additional 275 vehicles in the general-purpose lane, and increasing the total number of vehicles using the intersection at Fourth Street and Montano closer to its absolute capacity.

Those 275 vehicles carry 32% of the people traveling the corridor during each hour of peak usage. Adding an HOV lane is a relatively easy way to increase people-moving capacity, and to accommodate emergency vehicle access.

Adding a new general-purpose lane to Montano each direction will, in theory, increase capacity of Montano between Fourth Street and Coors Road to twice the current level during peak periods, which may be 3200 vehicles per hour. This is roughly 65% greater than the intersection's capacity as it is presently configured.

In actual practice the engineers do not believe that the number of vehicles using Montano will double if two new general-purpose lanes are added. Hall and Wilson agree that more vehicles will use Montano than the Fourth Street/Montano intersection can handle. They diverge over the exact vehicle count.

Wilson asserts that the intersection at Coors and Montano will "meter" the number of cars that can enter Montano eastbound so that the capacity of two general-purpose lanes each direction cannot be fully utilized. Wilson believes that the capability of the intersection at Coors and Montano to deliver vehicles onto Montano eastbound is 2,315 vehicles per hour. Rick Hall believes the quantity to be higher, although he did not provide a specific number. During public meetings Mr. Hall said that because the Coors/Montano intersection can feed eastbound traffic onto Montano from three directions, and that traffic

entering Montano from northbound Coors can turn right whenever there is an opening, the flow of traffic is continuous during periods of peak usage and the number of vehicles that can potentially enter Montano from the intersection is much higher than the road's capacity, configured either as a one-lane road eastbound or as a two-lane road eastbound.

Despite the divergence over specific vehicle count, both sets of engineers concur that the effect of adding another general-purpose lane eastbound will increase the traffic at the Fourth Street/Montano intersection to more than its capacity. Wilson places the excess at 155 vehicles per hour during peak usage.

According to Wilson, westbound traffic is currently "metered" at the Fourth and Montano intersection at 1,541 vehicles per hour, with the capacity to go up to 2,101 vehicles per hour.

Adding additional general-purpose lanes to Montano will serve only to move existing congestion from the Coors/Montano intersection to the Fourth/Montano intersection. It will not affect commute times.

Adding HOV lanes at the outside of the general-purpose lanes (as opposed to inside) will allow residents with streets and driveways opening onto Montano easier access to merge with or across the flow of traffic.

The Committee did not see any particular advantage to using one reversible HOV lane instead of two dedicated HOV lanes, particularly if other recommendations relating to speed limits and pedestrian crossings are implemented.

HOV Policy. Reconfiguring Montano to include HOV lanes represents an important and necessary commitment by the City of Albuquerque to the idea of moving people rather than vehicles. Over time one would expect commuters to begin changing their driving habits to include car-pooling or using public transit, particularly if facilities and policy are dedicated to that end. Adding HOV lanes to Montano should be the first step of many, so that Montano is linked to HOV lanes throughout the City.

Enforcement of the HOV lanes is critical to the new policy's success. Without vigorous enforcement it will not succeed.

Because the intersections at either end of the segment of Montano between Fourth Street and Coors cannot handle the increased traffic that will result from adding two general-purpose lanes, the City has an excellent opportunity to implement a responsible HOV policy, while at the same time better utilizing the Montano river crossing.

Re-design of the Fourth Street/Montano intersection. Neither engineering firm addressed how to reconfigure the intersection of Fourth and Montano. This issue was included in the mandate by the City Council. However, reconfiguring the intersection can only be realistically done in the context of what the cross sections of both the Fourth Street and Montano will look like at the intersection. Until the lane configurations for Montano and the North Fourth Corridor plan are completed the intersection cannot be redesigned.

Currently, the intersection receives more northbound and southbound traffic than it can efficiently handle during much of the day. Traffic can, and often does, back up both north and south from the intersection for up to one-half mile. Rick Hall indicated during public meetings that increasing the amount of time the traffic signal is green for eastbound and westbound traffic on Montano is not an option, in light of the snarl both northbound and southbound that already exists.

Hall nevertheless discusses the need to re-design both the Fourth and Montano intersection and Fourth Street itself. The Hall report attaches a Community Visioning Report dated November, 2004, prepared by Karpoff & Associates for the 4th Street & Montano Area Improvement Coalition. Hall also spends a significant amount of time addressing the need for improved “walkability” in the Fourth and Montano area. Hall’s suggestions for improving walkability should be implemented.

The Committee believes that a Fourth Street re-design is critical to improving the traffic flow along Montano, the traffic flow along Fourth Street, and to the livability, walkability, and commercial revitalization of the area.

At the same time, the Second Street/Montano intersection must be redesigned to facilitate the smooth flow of traffic not only along Second Street, but along Montano as well.

Re-configuring Montano without attending to both intersections seems a futile exercise.

Roundabouts. The Hall report only briefly mentioned traffic roundabouts as a possible method of improving traffic flow. However, Rick Hall discussed roundabouts at length with the Committee during meetings and telephone conference calls. The Committee was impressed with roundabouts as a concept that should be implemented by the City at the intersection of Fourth and Montano and well as intermediate points along Montano, and in particular as a substitute for the Rancho Caballero light. The Rancho Caballero light is today a major cause of congestion and delay for travelers on Montano. Replacement of the light with a roundabout would keep Montano traffic flowing at all times, while slowing it enough to allow access from side streets by both vehicles and pedestrians. More vehicles (and people) per hour can move if traffic flow is continuous, even if slowed while negotiating a roundabout.

Speed Limit Reduction. The Wilson report indicates the current average speed of vehicles along Montano during periods of peak usage is 20 mph. Rick Hall stated during public meetings that (perhaps counter-intuitively) slower traffic speeds can result in moving more vehicles per hour. This is so because at slower speeds vehicles can travel closer together. Slower speeds are also safer. They allow drivers more reaction time, and give them a broader field of vision. This, in turn, makes the area more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. Slower speeds also produce less noise. Walkability is improved. Like roundabouts, speed limit reduction seems a good solution to the problem of moving traffic efficiently while at the same time minimizing adverse impact on the Montano residential areas.

Respectively,

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