

CITY OF ALBUQUERQUE

Office of the Mayor/Chief Administrative Officer



Richard J. Berry, Mayor

April 18, 2013

Dewey V. Cave, Executive Director
Mid-Region Council of Governments
809 Copper Avenue NW
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102

Attention: Thaddeus Lucero

**SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR ACCESS MODIFICATIONS ON PASEO
DEL NORTE AND UNSER BOULEVARD WITHIN
VOLCANO HEIGHTS**

Dear Mr. Cave,

PO Box 1293 On behalf of the City of Albuquerque, I would like to formally request a modification to the access policy for Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard within the area covered by the proposed Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan. This Plan is expected to be adopted by the City Council in June 2013.

Albuquerque Over the last four years City staff from Planning, Council Services, Municipal Development, and ABQ RIDE have worked extensively with staff from the Mid-Region Council of Governments to design and coordinate transportation and land-use for this 570-acre area, including a grid of multi-modal streets, proposed transit routes, high-density mixed-use zoning, and density bonus incentives for high-quality development projects.

NM 87103 www.cabq.gov The Plan recognizes the importance of Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard as regional arteries, while at the same time, it recommends access points in addition to those allowed by the current Access Control Policy as necessary to support the high-density development the Plan intends to catalyze. As part of the planning effort, Nelson\Nygaard performed a traffic analysis that confirmed that the additional access points would not degrade the level of service of these limited-access roadways. Since that study was concluded, our staff met with representatives from DMD and the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) to further reduce the number of full access intersections we were requesting on these roadways, from approximately every quarter-mile (1/4) to almost a third of a mile (1/3). The full intersections and right-in/right-out access points are illustrated in the maps attached to this letter.

The proposed access points are necessary to support the proposed development, which offers several benefits to the transportation network in the area and to the greater region.

Volcano Heights will soon be designated the City's newest Major Activity Center, one of the few on the West Side. This designation, in concert with the mixed-use, walkable urban district envisioned by the Plan, is intended to provide opportunities for employment centers west of the river and offer a new choice for the pattern of development for West Side businesses and services. This is a significant step toward addressing the imbalance of jobs and housing on the City's east and west sides, which contributes to congestion on river crossings during peak commuting times, as well as beginning to change the pattern of exclusive single-purpose vehicle trips so prevalent on the West Side.

Much of what the Plan proposes is expected to reduce congestion on West Side roads. Mixed land uses and an urban development pattern will encourage walking, biking, and transit as opposed to single-purpose vehicle trips. The Plan requires developers to construct multi-modal streets that form a grid to disperse vehicle traffic and provide redundancy so important for safety response times.

This local street grid will serve a mix of anticipated land uses. By setting access points on Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard before development occurs, the access for local development will be limited to these internal roadways, thereby limiting to the pressure to add access points in the future and ensuring predictability for developers and regional jurisdictions.

Most significantly, the requested full access intersections surrounding the intersection of Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard create a "loop road" much like the one in the Uptown Major Activity Center that successfully provides access to the businesses within the walkable district without degrading service on the surrounding arterials. The loop road is expected to reduce congestion anticipated at the Paseo/Unser intersection and provide safe crossing for pedestrians and cyclists to the four quadrants formed by these limited-access, regional roadways.

Compared to the less dense, less walkable development scenario for this area currently included in the MRCOG forecast models, our high-level traffic study for the sector plan showed:

- Reduced a.m. peak hour traffic and no increase in p.m. trips from traffic generated within the plan area.
- Adequate traffic flow on Paseo del Norte and Unser Boulevard with increased access points and careful signal timing.
- Shorter vehicle trips because of the proposed mix of uses.
- More bicycle and walking trips because of smaller blocks and mix of uses proposed.

The current process for access modification is not adequate for this request, partly due to the scope of the request, but also because this is an undeveloped area. The typical process requires specific, imminent development that can demonstrate traffic counts that warrant access, as well as a net benefit to the system. What is being requested in Volcano Heights is a result of a sector plan, not a specific development proposal. The scale of the request has regional implications, with multiple access points and secondary roads providing access for mixed-use development that could happen any time over the next 30 years.

It is important to address access now versus leaving access request up to individual development projects, since it is unlikely that one development could ever show a net benefit to the system, as these benefits are contingent on multiple access points that help to disperse already-congested traffic patterns. It is also likely that without setting access now, the current process could be flooded with access requests in the future.

Perhaps most importantly, the kind of mixed-use, walkable land uses that are being proposed - which help to support transit as a viable transportation option, promote walking and biking, and reduce single-purpose vehicle trips - require more access than provided by policy and likely will not even be considered until additional access is available. The current access modification process would require some land uses to be in place before additional access is approved, creating a Catch-22 for development within Volcano Heights and making it unlikely that the region would ever benefit from a new development pattern on the West Side.

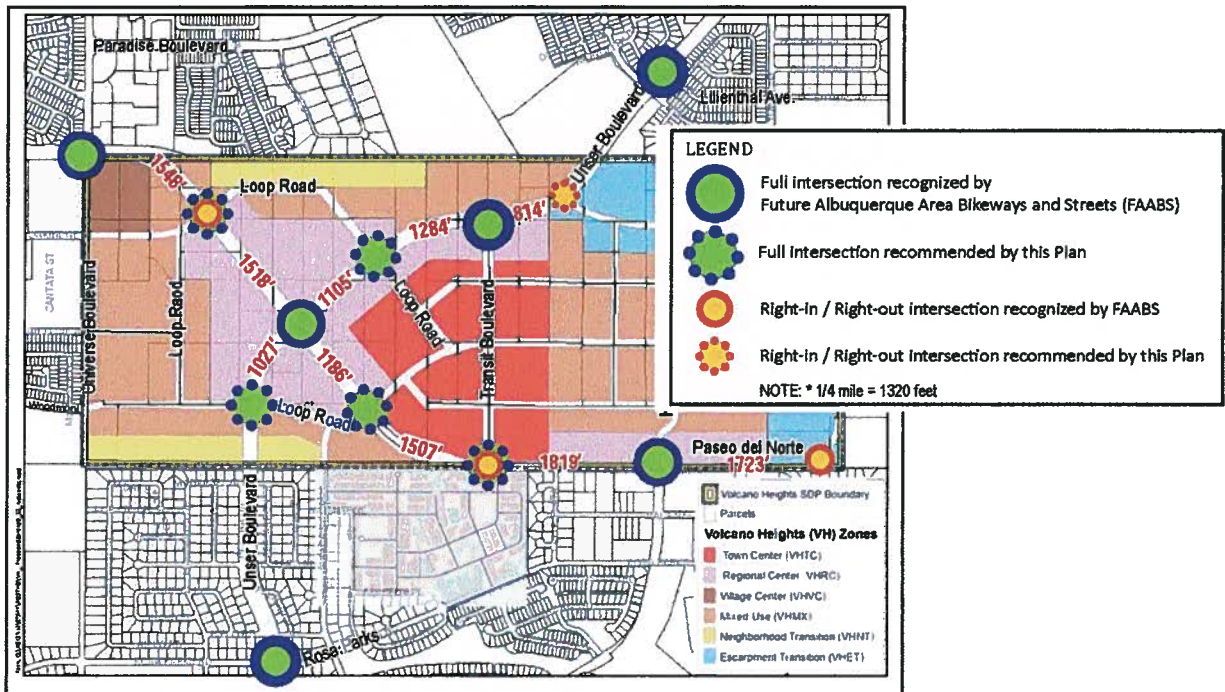
Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Best regards,

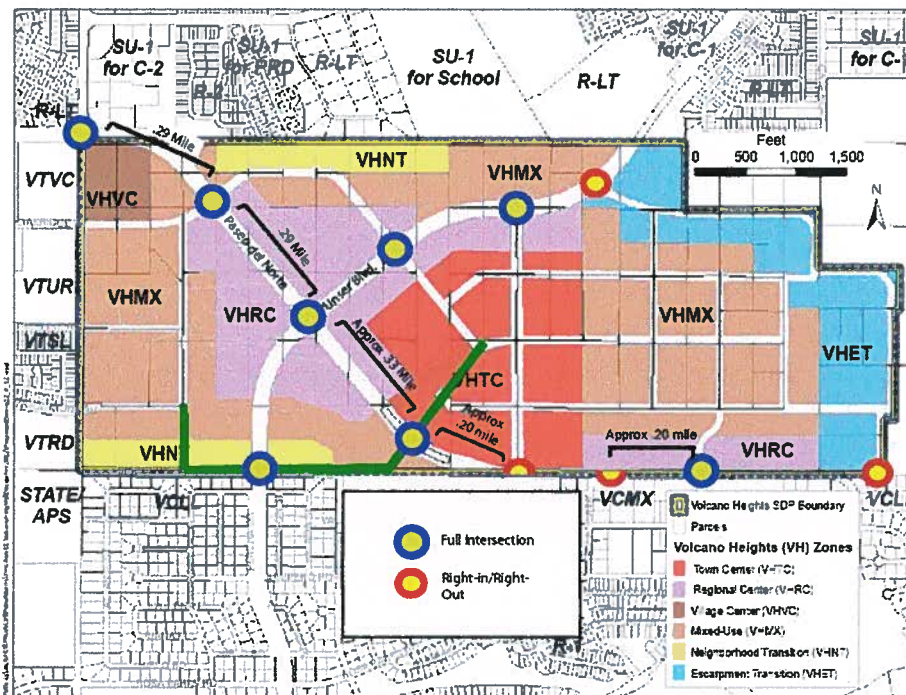


Robert J. Perry
Chief Administrative Officer

cc: Suzanne Lubar, Acting Director, Planning Department
Michael J. Riordan, PE, Director, Department of Municipal Development
Bruce Rizzieri, Director, ABQ RIDE
Laura Mason, Director, Council Services



Access Points as Proposed in Volcano Heights Sector Development Plan
 (NOTE: Zoning may change with access modifications)



Proposed Access Points in Volcano Heights Post-Negotiations
 (Note: Zoning on this map that differs from the above has not been formally requested)

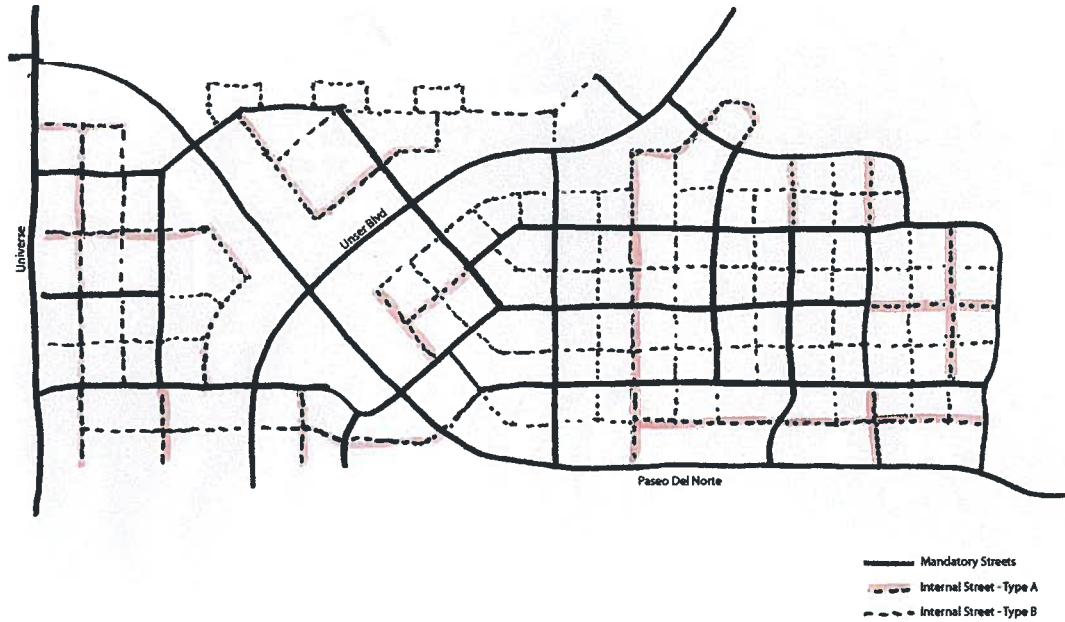


Illustration of Possible Internal Road Network

(Dependent on individual property owners. Included here for purposes of estimating block sizes, potential grid, etc.)