

Mount Rose Highway Safety Meeting, 12/5/18, 6:00 – 8:45 PM,

Commissioner Bob Lucey opened the meeting saying that he was there on behalf of Washoe County. He recognized the principals of NDOT, NHP, and Washoe County. Lucey made the following points:

- The meeting focus and discussion is about safety
- Construction, development, accidents led to where we are now
- Information gathering, sharing thoughts and concerns, professionals here will offer answers
- Data gathering and sharing
- “no perfect solution” and mitigation can’t be achieved through policy alone. Lucey stated that he is a “policy maker”. His presence isn’t necessarily conducive to finding solutions and would deter from the conversation.
- He will hold policy meetings – at state level.
- He requested that attendees maintain a “level of decorum” and then excused himself from the remainder of the meeting.

Thor Dyson, Assistant Director of Operations at NDOT spoke next. He said that NDOT had hired a consulting firm to do the study; Kimley-Horn & Associates. They could do it in an unbiased manner. They studied Highway 431 from Timberline down to Wedge Parkway. Their work included a Road Safety Assessment (RSA), a Speed Study, and an Intersection Control Evaluation (ICE).

Mike Colety, of Kimley-Horn, gave a presentation. He said their process was to form a multi-disciplinary team (including residents), do brainstorming, identify issues, and make suggestions. The suggestions would then be reviewed in detail by their engineers. They would also review the crash history in the area and make several trips to the site as part of a Field Review. They would go at different times of day and consider roadside features and drivers’ behavior. The study was done in July in an effort to expedite the effort. This was a compromise since the results would not include school traffic.

The crash study (from 2015-2017) revealed some interesting information.

- There had been 49 crashes on this stretch of road. This did not include two fatal crashes in 2018.
- Of these, 63% were “single vehicle accidents” which usually involve one car going off the road.
- Of these, 16% were rear-end collisions at the Thomas Creek signal.
- Of these, 18% of the accidents occurred when there was snow present.
- Of these, 31% occurred in the dark.
- More accidents occurred on Tuesday and Thursday than other days.
- More accidents occurred during the morning commute than any other time.

They conducted a “Signal Warrant Study” per a national standard and determined that no signal was warranted at the Callahan intersection.

The Speed Study showed the speeds at different segments of the section of Hwy 431.

- In Segment 1, West of Bordeaux, 85% of drivers were going 62 or less.
- In Segment 2, between Bordeaux and Callahan, 85% of drivers were going 64 or less.
- In Segment 3, between Callahan and Edmonton, 85% of drivers were going 62 or less.
- In Segment 4, between Edmonton and Wedge, 85% of drivers were going 60 or less.

- In Segment 5, between Wedge and Virginia, 85% of drivers were going 52 or less.

In the Field Audit, the engineers found some good features.

- Street names were well marked.
- Signs were very reflective.
- Lane markings were clear and reflective.
- The bus turnouts are useful in certain instances.
- Islands at Timberline were a benefit.

The Field Audit also revealed areas for improvement.

- Street lighting produces inconsistent illumination. The lamps should be changed to LED.
- There should be more speed limit signs: they're too far apart.
- Electronic signs should be added to warn of congestion and other hazards.
- Bike lane striping is not well thought out.
- One of the rumble strips is in the middle of a bike lane.
- The emergency signal isn't needed at the fire station. It is not staffed for emergencies.

The Intersection Control Evaluation was considered for the various intersections. These were the proposed solutions that NDOT will plan to implement.

At Callahan, a large traffic circle would provide the best cost and safety performance, but it will be large and expensive to build. In the short term, raised islands to define the turn lanes will be the most effective. The lane striping will also be changed.

At Mountain Ranch Road, mountain bike traffic crossing Hwy 431 is a problem.

At Fawn Lane should get a deceleration lane and an acceleration lane. It should get street lights and a center divider.

At Thomas Creek, there should be a pedestrian "landing pad" on the south side of the crosswalk. There should also be extended acceleration and deceleration lanes.

At Edmonton, the best solution would be to connect the western end of Butch Cassidy with the unoccupied leg of the Thomas Creek intersection. But, this would be involved and expensive. They will add an extended acceleration and deceleration lane. They will add a "high friction" coating to 431 where it passes Bargary Lane and tends to be slippery. They will also put in a raised median.

At Telluride, add acceleration and deceleration lanes. Also, add raised islands to channel the traffic.

At DeSpain/Sundance, make the same changes as to Telluride.

One resident asked about enforcing the speed limit to improve safety. Major Stepien (NHP) said that they've been writing a lot of tickets. They are not able to use automated cameras to write tickets per the NRS. There is a Bill Draft Request to allow the use of automated cameras with strict conditions.

Dwayne Smith discussed the county's process and fielded questions from the audience. He said that safety is the county's #1 priority. He went on to say there are many questions about how development impacts traffic. He said "I understand it's an inconvenience" to caustic laughter. Many of the attendees (roughly 80) were from the Rolling Hills neighborhood which has been terribly hurt by the Doral School and the work on the Colina Rosa (aka Symphony Ranch) development. Doral parents are presently waiting in the Galena High School parking lot for a text indicating that their child is ready to be picked up. Here are some of the questions that residents raised and comments they made.

- Why not open the emergency gate at the end of Paris Court in Monte Vista to allow traffic to exit to the East?
- How much more growth can the corridor handle given the current problems?
- How did Colina Rosa get approved?
- Why isn't an RSA required before any new development is approved?
- Why should the development be allowed to screw up peoples' lives?
- Have you personally been to Butch Cassidy during morning rush hour?
- How could you not see this was coming?
- You say safety is your #1 priority, how could you approve this development with all these safety problems?
- We have neither mobility nor safety with these developments.
- The county is approving growth without anticipating the problems.
- You're doing development in an unsustainable way.
- What limitations to Ascente will you apply given the problems on the corridor?
- The Doral Academy will have 1,000 students next year who will all be driven to school. The intersection at Doral forces drivers to go uphill toward Edmonton even if they want to go downhill to Wedge. For parents heading up to Thomas Creek, they need to go up to Edmonton, down to Wedge, and then back up to Thomas Creek.

Smith didn't have satisfactory answers to any of these challenges other than "this is the reality" which attendees were not willing to accept. Apparently, the original plan for Colina Rosa included the connection from Butch Cassidy to the Thomas Creek intersection. He made the implausible suggestion that the connection could be completed once Ascente builds Phase-II which will include 660 homes and will be required to access the Thomas Creek intersection. David Solaris (County Planning Dept. manager) defends the planning department and the processes. The crowd jeers when Commissioner Lucey's name comes up. Smith raises the idea of funding a Thomas Creek connection with a special assessment district. A resident points out that the current residents would be taxed to address a problem created by the developer.

A couple of issues were raised about the Edmonton intersection.

- The new, long deceleration lane means that speeds in the right-hand, eastbound lane of 431 are higher because the decelerating vehicles now have their own lane. The higher speeds make it harder for cars exiting Edmonton to merge safely.
- The curvature of the new right turn makes it difficult to see the cars coming in the right lane. The car position means that the traffic is not in the side mirror, but is too far for the driver to crane her neck.

One Rolling Hills resident complained about Lucey's absence and both Dwayne Smith and Dave Solaro emphasized that they ASKED him to leave because they wanted the meeting to focus on the issues and traffic mitigation efforts, and Lucey would not be able to add to the discussion. While this may have placated some attendees, it's well worth noting that Lucey and the BCC APPROVED the new developments, including Ascente, and are therefore responsible for the impact of this growth on existing residents. Mr. Solaro stated that development is happening in conformance with the 2010 Forest Area Plan (FAP), as part of an ongoing development process set into place in 2010, and that the County can't take away property rights of the developers. Property owners can sue county for not letting them develop their property according to approved Plans.

The issue of increasing population in the Mt. Rose Corridor is due to the confluence of development and impacts of development. Residents disagreed that they were allowed to participate in the decision making for traffic changes. Residents agreed that that development is unsustainable at the rate it is occurring now. Another resident commented that the County should never allow traffic studies to be done by developers.

The final discussion topic focused on financing upcoming projects as well as immediate road improvements desired by the local residents. Dwayne Smith stated that the Thomas Creek extension, arguably the best remedy for Rolling Hills highway access, will cost at least \$4.5 million. The County does not have funding to undertake this project. In other areas of Washoe undergoing increased development, residents seeking infrastructure improvements can utilize a Special Assessment District which creates a funding strategy to allow a funding structure that's not otherwise available. If residents pay for it, along with county design, the money is fronted through a bond sale. Residents pay for these bonds, with deferred payment over a period of time. Washoe County doesn't have a funding strategy to do these types of projects, without a special assessment. Dwayne also stated that there may also be some limited number of grants available to assist in infrastructure improvement but didn't elaborate.

One of the last comments of the meeting – maybe the Washoe County development Code is outdated now and needs to be rewritten to help preserve existing residents safety and lifestyle!

Dwayne Smith mentioned that he would like to hold another focused community meeting in January 2019, but did not elaborate on scheduling or topics.

There were a couple of questions that went unanswered.

- Why did earlier data show that the 85% speed was 72mph? Did drivers really slow down 10mph?
- If North-side residents must head uphill to make a U-turn, where should they make it?

[Notes co-authored by Hemlein & Wolgast]