



Governor Bill Richardson Releases Funding for Proposed Paseo del Norte Extension

Governor commits \$8 million to speed up other road projects to provide relief for west side residents

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SANTA FE- Governor Bill Richardson today announced he is releasing \$3.3 million in state capital outlay funds approved for the extension of Paseo del Norte Boulevard on Albuquerque's west side. Those funds are now available for use on the project, subject to applicable state laws and regulations.

"I started this process in the hope that through my involvement and a broader public discussion, we might move this issue forward," said Governor Richardson. "My goal has always been to provide relief to the thousands of commuters who battle clogged roads everyday- they deserve a safe, smooth ride to work or school. However, neither side has budged an inch, and rather than become an obstacle to the process, I am releasing the funding."

The Governor had required the city of Albuquerque to meet several conditions before releasing the funding, including providing a detailed plan to protect the Petroglyph National Monument, demonstrating the city had seriously investigated alternative construction options for the Paseo del Norte extension, asking the current council to vote on the issue, and proving the project is legally defensible.

"A majority of my conditions have been met, but not all," said the Governor. "At this time, I do not feel this process, or west side residents, will be helped by extending the debate over these conditions. It appears that unfortunately, litigation will ultimately provide the final resolution."

Governor Richardson also said he believes other solutions for west side traffic, including accelerating the completion of Unser Boulevard, and providing new mass transit options,

such as commuter rail, will help relieve traffic congestion better than Paseo del Norte. Therefore, he is returning the question of Paseo del Norte to the Albuquerque metro area for a solution and focus his efforts on other priorities for the west side.

“Extending Paseo del Norte is not the solution. I am committed to developing a comprehensive, long-term solution, and both roads and public transportation will play critical roles,” said the Governor. “I supported and signed legislation that enabled the establishment of Regional Transit Districts (RTD’s), and this year the legislature and I gave local governments the authority to fund the RTD’s through a gross receipts tax of up to ½ %. This will give municipalities the funding they need to obtain and operate mass transit, including commuter rail and rapid buses.”

Governor Richardson also outlined several initiatives he is prepared to fund to step up efforts to provide relief and opportunity for west side residents:

- \$5 million to jump-start the Unser Boulevard extension project, specifically to four-lane Unser between Atrisco and Paradise Boulevard. The Mid Region Council of Governments study made clear that Unser should be the priority in alleviating West Side congestion,
- \$2 million to accelerate the improvement of the I-40/west Central interchange, and
- \$1 million to initiate the planning and design process to improve the Jefferson-Paseo del Norte and I-25-Paseo del Norte interchanges. This is a critical aspect to solving the congestion problems on Paseo del Norte.

To date, Governor Richardson has already allocated \$250 million specifically for West Side road projects, through his GRIP initiative:

- \$60 million for rebuilding the Coors-I 40 interchange,
- \$6 million for improvements to Paseo del Volcan,
- \$50 million to improve I-40 from the west Central interchange to Coors, and
- \$80 million for the Governor’s commuter rail initiative, and \$28 million to improve Coors Between Central and I-25.

In addition to GRIP, the Governor has provided more than \$5 million for other west side related road projects:

- \$2 million in capital outlay for improvements to Coors between the Sequoia intersection and I-40,
- \$2 million for the “Unser Dogleg”,
- \$540,000 for an analysis of the Highway 550 corridor through Bernalillo,
- \$600,000 for park and ride, and
- \$55 million for improvements to I-25 between Tramway Road and Bernalillo.