Pyramid/McCarran Intersection Improvement Environmental Impact Statement Study

The Pyramid Way and McCarran Boulevard Intersection is a transportation network component serving the needs of the communities in Washoe County and the Cities of Sparks and Reno. The intersection, one of the busiest in the region, is an active and important crossroads for the Truckee Meadows linking Spanish Springs and unincorporated Washoe County to the north, downtown Sparks and I-80 to the south, US 395 and Reno to the west, and residential and industrial areas of the City of Sparks to the east.

Frequently Asked Questions

The following is a list of the various questions, comments and input the RTC has received from the public during previously held public information meetings. For reference, the three potential alternatives are: Direct Connection (eastbound to northbound flyover ramp), Expanded At-Grade-Intersection, and Grade Separation (bridge over McCarran).

1. **Q.** The Direct Connection (flyover) – would that be one lane?

A. Yes. The traffic analysis shows that one lane, one way in the eastbound to northbound direction, is all that is needed to carry future traffic. Without having to stop at the signal, the eastbound to northbound traffic moves efficiently. The flyover will have a breakdown lane/shoulder so minor accidents or flat tires do not shut it down.

2. **Q.** Does the future traffic volume for this intersection take into account building the Pyramid Highway/US 395 Connection?

A. Yes, the RTC Travel Forecast Model includes a plan for a freeway-type roadway between Pyramid Highway and US 395 by the year 2018 and beyond. This facility is planned to tie into Pyramid Highway in the vicinity of Disc Drive and connect to US 395 somewhere north of McCarran Boulevard. The current design alternatives for the Pyramid/McCarran intersection take into account the existence of this roadway and the traffic that it diverts from the intersection.

3. **Q.** How are church visitors going to access the freeway?

A. In addition to the current freeway access of McCarran Boulevard, west to US 395, and Pyramid Way south to I-80, in the future it is planned that there will be access to points west to US 395, via the Pyramid Highway north to the US 395 Connection mentioned above (refer to Q.2).

4. **Q.** Why are you only looking at one way to get out of Spanish Springs – just one route? You've been looking at this problem for years, and now not until 2030?

A. This project is one of several that are needed to address the traffic growth in the Spanish Springs area. The Pyramid corridor and the US 395 Connection are projected to need the highest capacity of the available routes. Increased capacity will also be needed on Vista Boulevard, Sparks Boulevard, and a new arterial that runs down through Sun Valley from Eagle Canyon Drive.

5. **Q.** Where are you going to get the funds for this project?

A. The project is currently being developed with federal Congestion Mitigation/Air Quality (CMAQ) funding. Additional federal and state funding will be sought, since this is a significant state highway accessing several Native American reservations. Local funding is also a possibility if federal and state sources fall short of needed amounts.

6. **Q.** Public input favors extension of Disc Drive along BLM land, yet for some reason the focus is on this intersection. Has due consideration been given to extending Disc Drive or Sullivan Lane?

A. As mentioned above in Q.4, The Pyramid Highway/US 395 Connection is envisioned to start in the vicinity of the Pyramid/Disc intersection and move traffic west to US 395. But improvements to the Pyramid McCarran intersection are also needed to accommodate the projected growth through the year 2030. The comprehensive long range regional plan, the 2040 RTP, can be read and downloaded at rtcwashoe.com. It may appear that an inordinate amount of attention is being applied to this intersection, but it is only the first of a number of projects and improvements that are needed to address congestion in the northeastern part of our community.

7. **Q.** The left turn access from northbound Pyramid onto westbound Emerson will be removed – what's the alternative?

A. The alternative will be to go north to the Queen/Pyramid intersection and either make a U-turn and then go right on Emerson Way, or turn left onto Queen Way to enter the neighborhood. Some of the design considerations that will be addressed are:

- Emergency Access to the neighborhood – A "mountable" curb will be used in the Emerson intersection so that emergency vehicles can still make the left turn, otherwise it will be an illegal movement.
- Signal timing and operation – Signal timing at Queen Way and the operational configuration of the Queen Way/Farr Lane intersection will be evaluated to make the intersection function efficiently to accommodate the new and additional movements.
- Right turn access onto Pyramid from Emerson and driveways – The signal timing will also be evaluated to provide "gaps" in the traffic stream in the right turn lane on Pyramid that will allow right turns onto Pyramid to occur, even during peak periods.

8. **Q.** Is there going to be any property condemned for anyone?

A. The alternative designs under consideration indicate that this project will require significant amounts of right-of-way acquisition. Previous projects to widen both Pyramid and McCarran have taken smaller pieces of property such as portions of property owner's backyards. This means that property acquisition for this project will require the acquisition of entire parcels. The process is required by federal law to be fair to the property owner as well as the State. The vast majority of the time, property is acquired without condemnation, at a fair price, and affected homeowners and lessees are fully compensated for relocation costs.

9. **Q.** Will the southbound right hand turn lane only be one lane?

A. The RTC is working on an early-action project which is called the Pyramid McCarran Southbound Right Turn Lane Project (SBRTL). It will consist of one lane. Pyramid will be widened from Emerson Way to McCarran Boulevard, and the merge/acceleration lane on McCarran will be extended so that there is ample room to move into the westbound travel lanes. With this configuration, only one lane is needed to accommodate the anticipated traffic for the immediate future. When the long-term project is built, the right turn lane will probably extend further north to near Queen Way.

10. **Q.** What happens to the intersections at Queen Way and McCarran Boulevard?

A. Both intersections will continue to be controlled by traffic signals after the preferred alternative is implemented.

11. **Q.** How does ingress & egress work with the Grade Separation (bridge over McCarran) option? What happens at Roberta Way?

A. The ingress/egress in the Grade Separation option is different for each access point. Access to existing side streets and properties is generally maintained at all points, but with minor adjustments. Roberta Way will be slightly impacted in the bridge option as sight distances require different signal timings for safety reasons.

12. **Q.** What will the turn arrangement be at McCarran/Pyramid westbound on McCarran – will you be able to turn southbound on Pyramid?

A. Yes, there is provision for the westbound to southbound left turn movement in all 3 alternatives under consideration.

13. **Q.** What about the southbound right hand turn lane at Pyramid to McCarran – something doesn't make sense here. If you know it's not going to solve the problem, why are you doing it?

A. RTC has a separate project from the main intersection project to develop a dedicated southbound right turn lane from Emerson Way to McCarran. This is a short-term solution that will provide partial benefit now, and will be funded with local money. Two of the heaviest traffic movements at the intersection are the southbound to westbound right turn in the morning and the eastbound to northbound left turn in the evening. The proposed southbound right turn gives a measure of congestion relief by reducing the delay associated with that one heavy movement. It can be done relatively inexpensively because very little right-of-way or modification to the existing roadway is needed. On the other hand, reducing the congestion associated with the left turn movement and the general growth in traffic through the year 2030 requires consideration of bridge structures, more lanes in all directions, and the acquisition of significant amounts of right-of-way. The costs associated with those improvements are high by comparison. It should also be noted that each of the alternatives for the full intersection project has a southbound right turn lane.

14. **Q.** When would you eliminate turns on Emerson Way?

A. Left turns onto Emerson Way from Pyramid Way will need to be eliminated when the full intersection improvements are constructed. Right turns onto Emerson Way will continue to be allowed even after the full improvement project is constructed.

15. **Q.** Why only one right turn from northbound Pyramid to eastbound McCarran?

A. The future traffic volumes for northbound Pyramid to eastbound McCarran do not require more than one lane.

16. **Q.** How will the Queen Way intersection work?

A. The Queen Way intersection would continue to be controlled by traffic signals after the preferred alternative is implemented. As mentioned above, the signal timing and the configuration of the Queen Way/Farr Lane intersection will also be evaluated to identify the potential for operational improvements.

17. **Q.** Do your projected traffic volumes at the Pyramid/McCarran Intersection include the Pyramid Highway/US 395 Connection?

A. Yes, the design target year of 2030 assumes the connection between Pyramid Highway and US 395 would be in place.

18. **Q.** With the Expanded at Grade Alternative, is that right turn from southbound to westbound free-flowing? How will people from Emerson Way enter or leave with all the traffic?

A. The proposed southbound right turn lane would be a free flow right turn lane. That is, traffic will not stop at McCarran but will “flow freely” into an acceleration lane and merge with westbound traffic. Access onto Pyramid from Emerson Way will be right turn only. Access should improve initially with the additional lanes on southbound Pyramid Highway diffusing traffic. The signal at Queen Way should also provide gaps in the traffic flow even during peak periods that will allow right turns and lane changes north of McCarran Boulevard. Access to Emerson Way from Pyramid will be “right turn only” for safety reasons.

19. **Q.** Why aren't you looking at other routes?

A. We have looked at other routes and we continue to pursue other projects which will alleviate congestion at this intersection. However, in all scenarios, this intersection continues to be a choke point unless significant capacity improvements are made.

20. **Q.** Could you look at another road around the Wildcreek Golf Course?

A. We have investigated such a route, but the costs are approximately double the initial estimates for the improvements envisioned at the intersection. The Pyramid Highway/US 395 Connection EIS will most likely include an element to move traffic north and west around the golf course.

21. **Q.** How much more would it cost to build more than one lane on the flyover?

A. We do not know at this point. However, the benefits vs. costs of adding one or more additional lanes to the flyover (Direct Connection) will be analyzed if that alternative is selected as the preferred alternative. Refer to Q.1 above.

22. **Q.** I've heard estimates of this project costing as much as $50 million. How far would $50 million go on a Disc to Sullivan to McCarran by-pass?

A. A very preliminary look at that potential route over to El Rancho Drive resulted in estimates of $80 - $100 million dollars. The Pyramid Highway/US 395 Connection EIS discussed in Q.6 will evaluate access issues along that corridor. See also Q.20.

23. **Q.** How do you handle four- to two-lane merges?

A. Merges would be designed according to appropriate design standards. If 4 lanes need to merge to 2, there will need to be a transitional section of 3 lanes between the 4-lane and 2-lane sections.

24. **Q.** Is Emerson Way going to be right in/right out only?

A. Yes.

25. **Q.** What happens if you do nothing? Is that an option which will be analyzed?

A. Doing nothing, or the "No Build" alternative, is always considered as an option. However, if no improvements are made at this intersection, traffic congestion and delay will continue to increase, there will be an increase in crashes at and near the intersection, air quality will deteriorate, traffic noise will increase unabated, and there will be a significant increase in traffic cutting through neighborhoods, i.e. Wedekind Road, 4th Street, Queen Way, etc. Because the intersection is beyond its capacity, increased congestion will manifest itself as longer periods of the conditions that exist during the morning and evening peak hours.

26. **Q.** What happens to the traffic when the project is being built?

A. For projects like this that occur on highly congested but essential arterials, the Maintenance of Traffic (MOT) plan, or traffic control, is a critical component of both the design and the contractor's bid proposal. The number of lanes of traffic that are left open, and access issues to neighborhoods and businesses, must be addressed in detail for all stages of the project. Utilization of "off-peak" hours, such as nights and weekends will be considered. The tradeoffs typically associated with construction MOT are between longer construction periods with less traffic disruption vs. shorter construction periods with more disruption. The public will be asked for its input into these decisions.