

Tribal Trails Connector

By Kathy Tompkins

As Teton County's Integrated Transportation Plan (ITP) takes shape and becomes a template for how Jackson and especially our neighborhoods will look and respond to our growing traffic problems, it's time to take notice of how the plan will affect our families and schools in and around Cottonwood Park and Range View Park. The Tribal Trails Connector is in the first tier of projects that the town and county want to pursue to relieve traffic on WYO 22 (without having to widen it) between Jackson and Wilson and the Y intersection of US 89 and WYO 22 where Wells Fargo Bank and Albertsons are located.

The proposed road would connect WYO 22 near where the community bike path in the Indian Trails neighborhood meets WYO 22. It will connect with the existing Tribal Trails Road that continues to the intersection of South Park Loop Road and West Boyles Hill Road.

WHAT WILL BE NEEDED?

_An updated traffic study - "Funding is still being hammered out. But it would likely be paid for by a partnership between the town of Jackson, Teton County and the Wyoming Department of Transportation, with each contributing about \$50,000 to the pot. (Study first step in ITP implementation - JH News and Guide - Jan 5th, 2016)

_County planners have said they intend to install roundabouts or other traffic-calming devices on South Park Loop Road and other nearby thoroughfares (High School Road). (Residents gather to blast proposed connector road - Jackson Hole Daily - Friday, June 26, 2015)

_Signalize the new intersection at WYO 22 and Tribal Trails Connector road and provide an eastbound right turn lane, a westbound left turn lane and separate northbound left and right turn lanes. (Draft South Park Sub Area and High School Road Corridor Transportation analysis from 2010)

_A parallel roadway thru Northern South Park from South Park Loop Road to US 89 will need to be built in order to alleviate the forecasted and not forecasted increased traffic on High School Road. (Draft South Park Sub Area and High School Road Corridor Transportation analysis from 2010)

ADVANTAGES

_The connector increases road network redundancy. (Teton County Comprehensive Plan)

_The connector would temporarily reduce traffic on WYO 22 at the Y intersection.

_The connector would allow neighborhood drivers and school traffic to bypass the Y and shorten their trip going to and from work in the West Bank and beyond. (2010 Draft South Park Sub Area and High School Road Corridor Transportation analysis)

DISADVANTAGES

“High School Road becomes a much more popular travel route for Connector traffic in the long term future than it is in the near term.” A forecasted 3,700 vehicles per day (Gregory Lane industrial buildout forecast not included) will travel the west end of High School Road to US 89 and continues south to either other parts of South Park or out of the study area. Only 200 vpd (that’s us) of the 3700 vpd will be neighborhood destination traffic. In spite of what officials hope for, thru traffic including commercial and tourist vehicles will be the majority of the vehicles using the connector making it a true bypass. (2010 Draft South Park Sub Area and High School Road Corridor Transportation analysis)

_The ITP did not include Gregory Lane buildout numbers in its forecast. Gregory Lane has the green light to increase light industrial and residential density. (Jackson Hole news and Guide – ‘Light industry space planned for Gregory’ – September 2, 2015) The Teton County Comprehensive Plan is promoting nonresidential and residential development on Gregory lane. (Section 3.2.b: Teton County Comprehensive Plan). This would increase traffic beyond the projected forecasts for High School Road.

_ “Several have criticized the plan for lacking a separate section on safety, and for lacking safety analyses of major capital projects.” (‘Y size tied to Tribal Trails, officials say’ – JH news & Guide – June 27, 2015) There is no bus service in Range View Park and Cottonwood Park. This will increase car trips by parents who worry about the dangers of increased traffic on High School Road. The connector would exacerbate congestion at High School Road and Corner Creek Lane where there is only one road in and out of the Corner Creek neighborhood. Middle School Road goes from a LOS B (loss of service) to a LOS D in the morning with the connector. (2010 Draft High School Road Corridor Transportation analysis)

_ “Air pollution from high-traffic roads increases the risk of asthma in children who attend nearby schools”. The stop and go nature of the increased traffic between schools, playgrounds and many athletic fields will make it worse. (News.health.com April 9, 2010)

_Town and county officials cannot prevent the widening of WYO 22 by diverting the growing number of vehicles on the high-volume corridor via the Tribal Trails Connector into neighborhoods. “WYDOT possesses statutory authority to expand that road as the agency sees fit, regardless of any local opposition.” (Y size tied to Tribal Trails, officials say - Jackson Hole Daily - Saturday, June 27, 2015)

_ Increased taxes will be needed to cover costs of new roads, services and development that follows. Sean O’Malley, Teton County engineer said larger roads encourage more traffic. “If you

build it, they will come. If you make it easier to do something — if you unbalance the cost versus the benefit — then I think you can induce behavior.” This should also be applied to the Tribal Trails Connector. (‘Public wants 4-lanes on highway to Wilson’ – JH News & Guide – Feb. 5 2014)

_ A future parallel road south of the high school would be a long way off subjecting High School Road to diverted traffic from high volume county and state traffic corridors for many years.

_ WYDOT does not have near term plans to widen the Wilson/Snake River Bridge with the downturn of the state’s revenue projections for the foreseeable future. The connector would not prevent future backups on WYO 22 to the bridge in case of an accident or summer tourist season traffic.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE TRIBAL TRAILS CONNECTOR

_ The town and county officials should work with WYDOT to reconstruct the Y first. They took a good step last fall by meeting in Rock Springs with WYDOT to look at different plans for the intersection.

_ Work with the roads we already have that need improving.

_ Invest in behavioral economics to reduce congestion on roads.

_ Invest in more mass transportation and the Community Path System. You get better return on the investment.

Finally, let me ask you this... Would you rather spend a lot of money to increase road capacity to achieve moderate and temporary congestion reductions and bear higher future costs from increased motor vehicle traffic and unnecessary increased development, or implement other types of transportation improvements?

I would love to hear from you on your take and more solutions. You can reach me at wozkins@hotmail.com. Thanks to the Cottonwood Park HOA committee for giving me this chance to reach out. Whether you are for it or against it, we should work to preserve the integrity and safety of our neighborhoods.