

## Report claims \$335M needed for highway construction

FRONT PAGE

**Mike Smith**

Carlsbad Current-Argus  
USA Today Network-New Mexico

More money was needed for a highway construction project in southeast New Mexico as safety was the top concern, according to a Washington D.C. transportation research group. An estimated \$335 million was needed to reconstruct nearly 60 miles of roadway along New Mexico State Road 128 and New Mexico State Road 31 from Eddy County to the Texas state line, read the study conducted by the National Transportation Research Project (TRIP).

According to the study, reconstruction with four driving lanes, alternating passing lanes, bridge replacements and intersection improvements were needed.

The New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) proposed a design-build project for N.M. 31 which extends 22 miles from a junction from U.S. Highway 285, noted an NMDOT website dedicated to the project.

The N.M. 128 project would extend 60 miles from N.M. 31 through the Lea County community of Jal to the state line with Texas, according to NMDOT. Rocky Moretti, TRIP director of policy and research, said southeast New Mexico as a whole would need \$945 million for various road projects.

Some southeast New Mexico legislators are working on a bill that would provide some funds for the 31 and 128 project, according to the New Mexico Legislature's website.

A report prepared by the New Mexico Legislature's Legislative Finance Committee (LFC) states existing pavement in several locations along the corridors in Chaves, Eddy and Lea counties were showing signs of distress and deterioration. The report cites once pavement conditions fall below fair, deterioration increases rapidly and pavement surfaces could fail if action is not taken.

"Approximately 35 percent of the 84-mile U.S. 380 corridor and 30 percent of the New Mexico 31 and New Mexico 128 corridors have low pavement conditions that require reconstruction or major rehabilitation," according to LFC. The bill received a do pass recommendation from a New Mexico House Committee. It awaits a hearing in the House Appropriations and Finance Committee as of Feb. 21 a hearing had not been scheduled, per the New Mexico Legislature's website.

New Mexico 128 and 31 was not the only project in southeast New Mexico needing money, Moretti said. Nearly \$55 million was needed for pavement rehabilitation along nearly 70 miles of U.S. 62/180.

"Those are the type of needs in the rural parts of the state and certainly both of those projects have significant benefits in terms of safety and the overall condition of the system," he said. Other aspects of TRIP report

The report found 34 percent of local and state-maintained roads in New Mexico are in poor condition and another 22 percent are in mediocre condition, costing the state's drivers a total of \$1.3 billion each year in extra vehicle operating costs, including accelerated vehicle depreciation, additional repair costs, and increased fuel consumption and tire wear, according to a TRIP news release. "New Mexico roads and bridges that are deteriorated, congested, or lack some desirable safety features cost the state's motorists a total of \$3 billion annually – as much as \$2,888 per driver in some areas – due to higher vehicle operating costs, traffic crashes and congestion-related delays," the release stated.

The report also noted that the efficiency and condition of New Mexico's transportation system was critical to the health of the state's economy. "Annually, \$125 billion in goods are shipped to and from New Mexico, relying heavily on the state's network of roads and bridges. The value of freight shipped to and from sites in New Mexico, in inflation-adjusted dollars, is expected to increase 59 percent by 2045," the report read.

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**NMDOT**  
THE NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

**\$5.75 BILLION NEEDED**

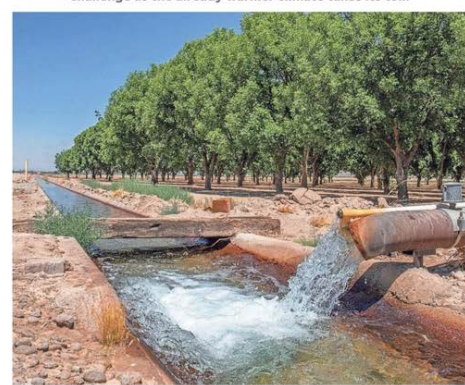
UNFUNDED TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

NMDOT HAS IDENTIFIED NEARLY \$5.75 BILLION IN NEEDED BUT UNFUNDED TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS THROUGHOUT THE STATE.

**TRIP** A National Transportation Research Nonprofit  
WWW.TRIPNET.ORG

State Rep. Candy Spence Ezell (R-58), State Rep. Cathrynn Brown (R-55), State Rep. Greg Nibert (R-59), State Rep. Jimmy Mason (R-66) and State Rep. Jim Townsend (R-54) introduced House Bill (HB) 223 titled Projects on Certain Highways, during late January in the 2023 New Mexico Legislature. The bill sets up a \$650 million appropriation through NMDOT's Appropriation Contingency Fund for spending during a nearly two-year period for acquiring rights of way, planning, design and construction of projects along N.M. 128 and 31 and on U.S. Highway 380 near Roswell.

There is a significant push to restore a small refuge of wetlands, rejuvenating a river out of memory, but even that work faces an uphill challenge as the already warmer climate takes its toll.



Groundwater wells fill an irrigation ditch for pecan orchards outside of Rincon. Regional farmers face higher salt levels, which can shrink the size of pecan nuts, kill trees and destroy soil health. Pecans are a key crop in El Paso County, which is being impacted by dual threats of less available water below and above ground, and degraded quality. PHOTOS BY ANNA CRAWFORD/SOURCE

## Salted earth at the tail of the Rio Grande's snowmelt

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## Democratic governors form alliance on abortion rights

Consortium to share ideas for protecting access

Bill Barrow and Geoff Mulvihill associated press. Democratic governors in 20 states are launching a network intended to strengthen abortion access in the wake of the U.S. Supreme Court decision ending a pregnancy and instead shifting regulatory powers over the procedure to state governments.

Organized by California Gov. Gavin Newsom, described the Reproductive Freedom Alliance as a way for governors and their staffs to share best practices and affirm abortion rights for women.

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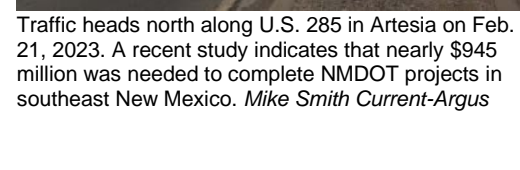
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Traffic heads north along U.S. 285 in Artesia on Feb. 21, 2023. A recent study indicates that nearly \$945 million was needed to complete NMDOT projects in southeast New Mexico. Mike Smith Current-Argus