

## Eddy County road plan looks to address alternatives for dangerous intersections



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Carlsbad Current-Argus



### Death highway: The dangers of U.A. 285 in New Mexico

Locals have a new name for the section of U.S. 285: Death Highway. In 2018, there were 49 crashes. *Searchlight New Mexico, Wochit*

Two Eddy County intersections listed as extremely dangerous are included in a transportation plan being prepared by the county.

The Eddy County Master Transportation Plan (MTP) will evaluate transportation needs and strengthen programs to assist the decision-making process in the coming decades, read the MTP website.

MTP will offer guidance by identifying trends and issues impacting Eddy County and establish goals and objectives for creating a transportation system meeting the needs of residents and supporting economic development in unincorporated areas of Eddy County, according to the MTP website.

Eddy County Public Works Director Jason Burns said the county is seeking input from the public to update the existing MTP which was drawn up nearly five years ago.

Launched nearly one week ago, the website listed a turn lane on U.S. highway 285 to eastern and western sections on Mill Road north of Artesia as a safety concern.

East Mill Road is home to the City of Artesia's Industrial Park, which contains some national and Eddy County-based oil and gas businesses, per the Artesia Chamber of Commerce's website.



A tractor-trailer attempts to turn east on Mill Road in Artesia on May 9, 2023. U.S. highway 285 and Mill Road were listed as safety concern for a master transportation plan. *Mike Smith Current-Argus*

The Artesia Industrial Park occupies 180 acres of land just off Mill Road, per the chamber's website.

South of Carlsbad, the MTP website lists the intersection of New Mexico State Road 128 and New Mexico State Road 31 as an extremely dangerous intersection.

Burns said the New Mexico Department of Transportation (NMDOT) was still in the design process for the impending work on N.M. 128 and N.M. 31.

A portion of N.M. 31 extends 22 miles from a junction with U.S. 285 and U.S. highway 62/180 south of Carlsbad, according to an NMDOT website dedicated to the project.

The N.M. 128 portion extends 60 miles from N.M. 31 through the southern Lea County community of Jal to the Texas State line, the website noted.

NMDOT plans to improve the intersection of U.S. 285 and N.M. 31 with a new signal system.

Burns said NMDOT would utilize a design-build plan for the project. Per the NMDOT website, design-build provides maximum funding flexibility for the state transportation agency and its partners to allow NMDOT "to aggressively move towards starting construction of the improvements sooner."



The intersection of Mill Road and U.S. highway 285 in Artesia was listed as safety concern as Eddy County attempts to draw up a master transportation plan. *Mike Smith Current-Argus*

A report released earlier this year by the National Transportation Research Project (TRIP) said improvements were needed along N.M. 128 and N.M. 31.

Rocky Moretti, director of policy research for TRIP, said improvements were critical.

"Nationally 28 percent of traffic fatalities occur at intersections and improving roadway safety design at intersections, along with further efforts to improve driver behavior will be needed to reduce serious and fatal traffic crashes in New Mexico, which annually costs the state \$2.8 billion in economic loss," he said.

The TRIP study said construction of four driving lanes, alternate passing lane, bridge replacements and intersection improvements were needed along N.M. 128 and N.M. 31.

Burns said a series of meetings were planned for Eddy County stakeholders and the general public to gather community input.

"(Eddy County wants to) develop a new plan to refer and utilize as a county," he said.

Burns said the Bohannon Huston engineering firm would prepare the final MTP and present it to the Eddy County Board of County Commissioners sometime in the fall of this year.

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