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## Arlington's Abram Street to be reduced by two lanes downtown

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**ARLINGTON** — -- The future Abram Street through downtown will feature safer on-street parking, more trees, wider sidewalks and two fewer traffic lanes when it is rebuilt in the coming years.

The Arlington City Council decided last week to narrow a section of Abram Street, which currently has four east-west traffic lanes and a center turn lane, between Cooper and Collins streets in an effort to encourage both pedestrian activity and redevelopment.

Construction on the bond-funded project is expected to begin in 2017 and be complete by 2018, officials said.

When rebuilt, this section of Abram will have one westbound lane, one eastbound lane, a center turn lane and some on-street parking.

City leaders chose the design after months of gathering feedback from residents and downtown property owners. Although some had called for Arlington to keep the thoroughfare the same number of lanes, city and community officials said doing so would not free up space for amenities, such as landscaping, benches and patio dining spaces, aimed at making downtown more attractive for shoppers and diners.

"For us, it's always been about the people. The important benefit we achieve with this option is we make Abram Street a place for people," said Tony Rutigliano, Downtown Arlington Management Corp. president.

A pedestrian-friendly downtown is one of the goals adopted in 2004 as part of a vision for the heart of the city. Officials said Abram Street has limited pedestrian amenities, little landscaping and sections of sidewalks that are broken, missing or that don't meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements.

In addition to wider sidewalks, new lighting and benches, street trees are among of the planned amenities.

"It will take some years for the trees to develop, but long term it will provide some shade that will make it a pleasant experience in the evenings and summer time," said David Wynn, Public Works and Transportation assistant director.

While some traffic may divert to other east-west streets, such as Division Street, Abram Street will remain large enough to handle motorists going through downtown to get to Cooper Street or destinations such as the University of Texas at Arlington, officials said.

Based on traffic models, a consulting firm told city officials that reducing Abram Street by two lanes through downtown would increase travel time between Cooper and Collins streets during the afternoon rush hour by less than 30 seconds for eastbound motorists and by about 2 minutes and 30 seconds for westbound motorists.

"There will be a little bit less capacity but I don't think it will be so significant that it will be just gridlock," Wynn said. "We think it's a good compromise."

### "Nitty gritty of the design"

Some residents who participated in a workshop to help shape future Abram Street raised concerns that the lane reduction would increase traffic congestion and some suggested that the city focus on making the less-traveled South Street more pedestrian friendly instead.

"First, it baffles me why wider sidewalks are needed along Abram, since hardly anybody uses the sidewalks we've currently got," resident Tim Laitinen wrote to the city in opposition of the lane reduction. "There are UTA students who walk across Abram to get back and forth from the fast-food restaurants, and city employees who walk across Center and Mesquite to get back and forth from City Tower. But for the most part, the sidewalks are empty. Besides, for much of the year, the concrete serves more as a skillet in our Texas sun than as an ideal place for a stroll."

Not all of the downtown stretch will be reduced. Abram is expected to narrow down to three lanes about 300 feet east of Cooper Street. It will revert back to its current five-lane configuration somewhere between 300 to 500 feet west of Collins Street, Wynn said.

A design consultant, who had not yet been hired, will help the city determine where to begin narrowing the street and map out specifics as far as on-street parking, turn lanes and other amenities.

"We've looked at this thing from 50,000 feet and we are going to zoom in now to get to the nitty gritty of the design," Wynn said.

The center turn lane is expected to accommodate traffic turning left or right in areas with multiple business driveways and side streets, Wynn said. Some sections may have a dedicated left-turn lane only, such as at the Center and Mesquite streets intersections.

### **Reverse angle parking**

The city will also talk with property owners about whether they want to keep the on-street parking in front of their shops, restaurants or offices or convert that space into a wider sidewalk area. Rutigliano said doing so would create space for public art or even patio cafes.

"We don't have enough activity on the street to make people feel like this is a destination. By adding patio space, by adding public gathering space, you are going to feel like the place is more vibrant because you are going to see more people," he said.

On-street parking that is added back will be reverse angle back in parking, meaning motorists will back into their parking space instead of driving forward into it. This option gives motorists better visibility as they leave a parking space to enter back into traffic, Wynn said. Customers using on-street parking now have complained about not being able to see past surrounding parked cars as they back out into traffic, causing a public safety concern.

City leaders also explored narrowing Abram to four lanes for the entire stretch between Cooper and Collins streets with no center turn lane or narrowing a shorter section between West Street and the Tarrant County subcourthouse down to three through lanes with a center turn lane.

Removing the center turn lane would more significantly impact travel time, the traffic model found.

Arlington voters approved nearly \$22 million in the 2008 bond election to rebuild Abram from Cooper to the Grand Prairie city limits.

This report contains material from the Star-Telegram archives.

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