

## Arlington considering future of Abram Street

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ARLINGTON -- Abram Street though downtown won't be rebuilt for at least another four years, but city leaders are already beginning work to determine how the thoroughfare can better serve vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists.

Earlier this month the Arlington City Council approved a \$55,000 contract to study how traffic downtown could be affected if Abram Street between Cooper and Collins streets were reduced from four lanes to three or two lanes. The traffic analysis, expected to be complete by the end of this year, will include models showing Abram with wider sidewalks, more landscaping, additional on-street parking, bike lanes and even transit stops.

"Everybody agrees it's not the most aesthetically pleasing roadway. With the Levitt Pavilion, improvements along Center Street and the new businesses coming, we need to upgrade the roadway to fit the environment it's in," said Keith Melton, Public Works and Transportation director.

In 2008, Arlington voters approved nearly \$22 million to rebuild Abram Street from Cooper Street to the Grand Prairie city limits. The road, previously a state highway, is in poor condition, Melton said.

The work will be done in three phases, with the section from Texas 360 to the eastern city limits to be rebuilt and widened to six lanes first. That project is expected to go out for bid later this year.

The section from Texas 360 to Collins Street will be rebuilt during the second phase, which includes construction of a new, higher bridge over Johnson Creek to prevent the roadway from flooding during storms, Melton said.

That project is expected to go out for bid next summer or fall.

### Public opinion

Construction on the downtown section of Abram, however, isn't expected to begin until at least 2015, after the other two sections are completed, and would be finished by the end of 2016.

"We don't want to have all of Abram tore up at once," Melton said.

After traffic analysis, the city expects to begin collecting public comments early next year on what the new roadway should look like -- such as what landscaping and pedestrian amenities residents and business owners want to see.

More studying and planning are necessary, city leaders say, because the section of Abram that runs through downtown could have significant influence on redevelopment.

Arlington anticipates spending roughly \$4.4 million of the \$22 million in bond funds on the downtown section.

Downtown Arlington Management Corp., a nonprofit economic development agency that supports downtown businesses, is pushing for Abram to become more pedestrian-friendly. Downtown businesses and entertainment venues, such as the Levitt Pavilion across from City Hall, would benefit if visitors, college students and residents felt safer walking to them, said Tony Rutigliano, the group's executive vice president.

"For me and for most folks you talk to in downtown, Abram Street has become our Main Street. It's where the development is occurring," Rutigliano said.

### 'Destination road'

Right now, many people see Abram Street as just a way to get to Texas 360, Rutigliano said. The downtown group wants to see changes made where Abram could be closed down to traffic for festivities, such as Fort Worth does for the Main Street Arts Festival.

"It doesn't have the right feel for a downtown thoroughfare now. It's more of a pass-through road than a destination road right now," he said.

Arlington resident Jerry Sanders, who works downtown, said he would prefer Abram to remain four lanes and added that he does not support adding designated bike lanes.

"The bikes shouldn't be allowed on the street," said Sanders, who was eating lunch at Twisted Root Burger Co. on Abram.

Sanders said he feels cyclists are a hazard to motorists and are not financially supporting road repairs because they didn't have to pay taxes at the gas pump. "They take up the road. They run through stop signs. They use our roads, and they don't pay for it."

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