

# Downtown traffic changes part of budget

By Steve Vied, Messenger-Inquirer

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Major changes to downtown Owensboro traffic patterns, such as converting Second, Fourth and Fifth streets to two-way traffic and building a roundabout on the west side of town, will no doubt be an expensive proposition. But City Manager Bill Parrish said the changes are a top priority, and money from the city's \$59.4 million downtown master plan budget will be found to pay for them.

The city will seek state help, however, and may even look to the federal government for stimulus funds, Parrish said.

A traffic study for downtown Owensboro being performed by the Lexington consulting firm ENTRAN is rapidly moving from the draft stage to the final recommendations stage, with the City Commission scheduled to vote on the concept Tuesday. Last week, ENTRAN officials presented their draft recommendations to the public and listened to a variety of concerns.

Costs have not yet been attached to the recommendations, but the roundabout where West Second and West Fourth converge alone figures to be a high-price item. As a reference point, building a roundabout at Kentucky 56 and Kentucky 81, which is expected to begin later this year, carries a \$2.69 million price tag. City Engineer Joe Schepers said the roundabout in the ENTRAN plan won't be as expensive as the Kentucky 56/81 circle but will still carry a million-dollar price tag.

Schepers said ENTRAN will start working on the cost phase of the traffic study in April. Items that will be priced include new traffic signals, signage, the roundabout, curb changes at corners and new striping.

"The city has to pay for them," Parrish said of the changes. "We will seek state assistance. The (city) staff will recommend that we pay for them with downtown funds."

The total budget for downtown revitalization, covering city and county spending, is \$79.4 million. The city's portion of that is \$59.4 million. The county's \$20 million portion will be spent completely on the convention/events center, with the city adding up to \$7 million to complete that element of the master plan.

The downtown master plan budget, which is constantly shifting based on changing costs for various elements of the project, lists \$12.9 million for changes to Veterans Boulevard, Second Street and Frederica Street. In December, Downtown Development Director Fred Reeves addressed the issue of paying for traffic changes.

"The biggest unknown is the conversion of Second Street," Reeves said. "We may have to obtain property. The \$2.5 million (in the budget for Second Street) is only streetscape, not the major issues of the traffic study."

Parrish said the master plan budget was written with unforeseen expenses taken into consideration. It already contains contingency fund of \$12.5 million, but more than half of that may be needed for the convention/events center. Cost savings in the budget will free up money for unforeseen expenses, Parrish said.

"This (traffic changes) is critical to the hotel and convention center, which are the linchpins," Parrish said. "The purpose of the traffic changes is to calm downtown, to slow things down and

remove trucks and make it walkable, that's the essence of the downtown plan. ... The focus is to slow traffic down and invite people to walk around downtown."

The most significant change to downtown traffic being proposed by the highway experts is the rerouting of U.S. 60 around Owensboro on what is now the U.S. 60 bypass, leaving Second and Fourth streets as two-way city streets. They are both one-way streets now and together serve about 24,000 vehicles a day.

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## Downtown traffic changes reflect vision

**By the Messenger-Inquirer**

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The rebirth of downtown Owensboro is going to depend on more than the bricks and mortar, concrete and rebar that will reshape its appearance.

The vision of downtown Owensboro includes a network of streets strolled by pedestrians and uninterrupted by the roar of truck traffic. The draft of the traffic plan offered this week shows a way to achieve that new atmosphere, and offers a viable solution that still addresses the concerns of business owners.

Spend any time in downtown Owensboro today, and you'll realize how Second and Fourth streets are heavily traveled by heavy trucks. The one-way streets increase the speed of traffic, which from a transportation standpoint is a plus, but which detracts from the atmosphere downtown planners are trying to create.

Sidewalk cafes and boutique shops thrive in a walkable environment, not one designed to move as much traffic as quickly as possible through an area. That's what Second and Fourth streets now are -- highways through downtown designed with efficiency, not ambiance, in mind.

Under the plan offered this week, most of Second and Fourth streets would become a two-way thoroughfares that will slow down traffic and be more conducive to those coming downtown instead of those passing through. The eastern ends of the streets between Triplett and Breckenridge streets would continue to be one-way to accommodate truck traffic at Owensboro Grain, Yager Materials and LaFarge Corp.

To handle the change, a new roundabout would be built where West Second and West Fourth streets converge on the west end of town as U.S. 60 continues west out of town as a two-lane, two-way federal highway.

From a business traffic standpoint, the plan addresses the needs of truck traffic with minimal inconvenience. Those trucks that had used Second or Fourth streets to head through town will now be directed to the U.S. 60 bypass, which will offer a more efficient through route.

Though the traffic planners had considered making Triplett and Breckenridge streets two-way, they propose those streets remain one-way to continue to offer a faster north-south route through town from the bypass that connects to riverfront industries. Truck traffic will be barred from Second Street, but no other limits downtown are expected, according to City

Engineer Joe Schepers.

The new downtown that is already being built is one that is meant to be experienced on foot and up close, not through the window of a vehicle driving 30 mph on its way out of town. Slowing traffic and rerouting trucks away from downtown's core will go a long way toward creating that atmosphere as the buildings and blocks continue to take shape.