

## IT'S BACK

Release of RTA funds would revive Academy-Woodmen overpass

By JANE REUTER THE GAZETTE

A long-planned Woodmen Road overpass at Academy Boulevard is back on the city's project list because of the Rural Transportation Authority tax.

Traffic planners have wanted an overpass to ease congestion for years, but have not had the money to build it.

"Prior to the RTA, we could not afford the bridge, so we were just going to do the best we could widening the intersection," city engineer Robin Kidder said.

Money from the RTA, if approved, would supplement grants so the city could build a bridge to route Woodmen over Academy. The \$20 million bridge is part of a two-year, \$30 million project to widen Woodmen Road to six lanes east from Vincent and Campus drives past Woodmen Commons, the shopping center on the northeast corner of Woodmen and Academy.

That section of construction, slated to begin next year, is the first phase of a plan to widen Woodmen to six lanes from Interstate 25 to Powers Boulevard.

Although the newly formed RTA board hasn't approved a project, the Woodmen Road interchange and widening is listed among proposed projects presented to the board Monday. No one objected to any project on the list, said RTA board member and El Paso County Commissioner Wayne Williams.

The need, Williams said, is clear.

"It's probably the highest traffic intersection in my district, which is why we always stood there for (campaign) honk and waves — my campaign, (President) Bush, (Gov. Bill) Owens, (Sen. Wayne) Allard," he said. "There have been signs for everybody there because people are stuck with nothing to do but look at you."

The city has added doubleleft turn lanes and made other improvements, but the intersection is jammed during rush hour. That, in turn, bogs down eastbound traffic as far back as I-25, sharply reducing the efficiency of the recently completed improvements there.

"When the light goes green on Academy, all of Woodmen has to wait," Kidder said.

The overpass isn't expected to displace businesses at Woodmen and Academy.

"In the long term, we think it's probably a good thing," said Jay Rosenbaum, a partner with Warren Dean in the development of Woodmen Commons. "We have an agreement with the city that they won't materially change our access or visibility, and we're sure they'll honor that.

"We're anxiously awaiting their plans."

A similar structure is planned at Austin Bluffs Parkway and Union Boulevard. That \$33 million, two-year project is the largest on the RTA list. A starting construction date hasn't been set.

The Woodmen Road improvements were recommended as part of the 2000 East-West Mobility Study, which advises ways to reduce congestion on the city's crosstown thoroughfares. It also recommended widening Austin Bluffs Parkway and the Martin Luther King Jr. Bypass to six lanes, and specified Powers Boulevard be turned into a limited-access freeway.

This isn't the first time the city thought it had financing for the overpass in the bag. In 1998, the Colorado Springs City Council negotiated a deal with Rosenbaum-Dean for that company to help pay for it.

But no payment formula was agreed upon, and the deal fell through after the shopping center was built.

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- WHAT A \$20 million Woodmen Road bridge over North Academy Boulevard, shown here running to the top-right corner of the illustration. WHY: Rush-hour jams during stops at traffic lights. WHEN: Bridge construction would begin next year as part of a plan to widen Woodmen Road to six lanes.