

Rob Sabo | Info@nmbw.biz

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ROADWAY remake



Courtesy RTC |

Construction worker dig in a trench created by the RTC project to recreate the stretch along Fourth Street and Prater Way from downtown Reno through S...

Fourth Street, along with Virginia Street, enjoys perhaps the richest heritage in Reno's storied history.

Long before Interstate 80 was built, Fourth Street was the main thoroughfare through Reno. State Marker No. 220, a blue metal sign shaped like the state of Nevada, sits at the corner of Fourth and Toano streets. It's the site where boxers Jim Jeffries and Jack Johnson clashed in the racially charged "Fight of the Century" in 1910.

Although that corner is now home to Reno Salvage Company, the history of Fourth Street is undeniable, from its many motels to its historic brick buildings. That history will be preserved as the Regional Transportation Commission gives the Fourth Street/Prater Way corridor a much-needed facelift.

The \$52.5 million project that broke ground in February will add sidewalks and bike lanes from the bus station at Fourth Street and Evans Avenue east to Pyramid Way. It also includes installation of eight new bus stations. The RTC worked with local historian Alicia Barber to capture the deep history of the corridor in oral stories told by longtime residents and business owners. That history will be prevalent throughout the design of the eight bus stations, which will include interpretive materials at the stations and on the sidewalks.

The many improvements reshaping Fourth Street and Prater Way stem from a 2012 corridor study that identified the area as a priority for investment.

Lee Gibson, executive director of the Regional Transportation Commission, says the improvements to the corridor are designed to improve safety and accessibility to public transportation routes, as well as to increase access to public transportation for the disabled.

Due to its age and the proximity of all the above-ground utilities, the corridor was probably the single biggest concentration for lack of accessibility for the disabled, Gibson adds.

"Traffic count analysis shows that if you go by car from Reno to Sparks, you will likely take the interstate," Gibson says. "But if you have to take the bus, or ride your bike, you are going to be on the Fourth/Prater Corridor – that drove a lot of key issues you see in construction today.

"That corridor is the single stretch of road for cyclists, transit users, pedestrians, and most significantly for the design of the project, the disabled," he adds. "The sidewalk conditions right now don't meet the requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act, and this project will bring us to and above those standards."

More than 3.2 miles of six-foot-wide or more of sidewalk space and new bike lanes will run from Pyramid Way west to the Fourth Street bus station to increase access for the disabled, as well as alleviate crashes involving pedestrians and cyclists that happen along the corridor.

Spanish Springs Construction is the general contractor on the job and is tasked with moving all the various utilities underground. SSC, along with the RTC, is working hand-in-hand with NV Energy, Truckee Meadows Water Authority and other organizations to sink utilities. As usually is the case, undergrounding utilities in an older part of the city is not without a few surprises.

Gibson says that most often, existing underground infrastructure hasn't been found exactly where it's supposed to be. Crews also unearthed an undocumented underground storage tank, similar to what happened when the Fourth Street bus station was built.

"When you work in the (city) core, you are going to get surprises," Gibson says. "It's just a function of time, changes in utility technology, and changes in the condition of the utilities that are there."

RTC is not upgrading or modernizing any utilities unless it falls under its umbrella, such as upgrading the communications technology for the traffic signals in the area.

When completed in summer of 2018, the new Fourth Street and Prater Way will look nothing like it has in the past. Fourth Street will remain four lanes near downtown, but east of Valley Road to Sutro Street it will be configured as two eastbound lanes and one westbound lane into downtown. East of Sutro, the roadway will be one lane in each direction, with a center turn lane.

Amy Cummings, RTC planning director, says there are not huge traffic counts along that section of Fourth Street.

"Taking it down to one lane in each direction is fine for traffic operations, and the center turn lane lets people who want to make left turns pull out of that flow of traffic," Cummings says.

Additionally, RTC will add eight new BRT, or Bus Rapid Transit stations, each with level-loading platforms so riders won't have to step up or down to enter/exit the bus. It may seem trivial to non-bus riders, but all those extra seconds spent waiting for riders to get on or off the bus add up, Gibson says.

"It is convenient for the customer when the bus stop and the bus are at the same height, but there's an economic reason for that (too)," Gibson says. "The shorter that bus is at that stop to let people on and off, the less it costs to operate it. If it's there a long time, the bus is not doing its job, which is moving people. These eight bus stops will help us move people more efficiently through the corridor."

The RTC also will put five new all-electric busses into service in the corridor. Route 11, which moves riders from Fourth Street Station at Evans Avenue to Centennial Plaza on Victorian Avenue in Sparks, has the second-highest ridership of all routes with more than 5,000 trips per day. It will be renamed the Lincoln Line to honor the former Lincoln Highway, the main artery through town that was superseded by Interstate 80.

The project is being funded through the RTC-5 fuel tax, sales taxes, and grants from the Federal Transportation Administration and the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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