

Gov. nixes \$8M for ABQ-area road projects

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Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham vetoed legislation Monday that would have provided millions for statewide transportation projects, including \$8.3 million for projects in the Albuquerque area. (Jim Thompson/Albuquerque Journal)

The coronavirus' first victims in Albuquerque appear to be several road projects.

Citing a need to be fiscally prudent in the face of plummeting oil prices and the coronavirus threat, New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham on Monday vetoed nearly \$50 million in statewide transportation project funding approved by the Legislature.

The list included \$8.3 million for 24 road and trail projects around the Albuquerque area.

"We do not yet know the degree to which COVID-19 and declining oil prices will impact our State's economy," Lujan Grisham wrote in her veto message. "Given this uncertainty, I bear a heightened obligation to ensure that all significant expenditures constitute a demonstrably sound investment in New Mexico. (Senate Bill) 232 falls short of that mark, because it appropriates nearly \$50 million to road projects whose scope and total cost is often unclear."

The biggest loser in the Albuquerque area is the Paseo del Norte corridor. The veto erased \$1.3 million for the effort to widen Paseo between Calle Norteña and Rainbow Boulevard.

But it also took out \$595,000 allocations to improve each of the following:

- Interstate 40/118th Street interchange
- “Deficient infrastructure” near Barstow and Alameda in the Northeast Heights
- South Valley roads and lighting
- Senator Dennis Chavez/Condershine intersection in Southwest Albuquerque

The bill Lujan Grisham struck down included funding to improve crosswalks, bicycle routes and trailheads, and, in some cases, make upgrades to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act.

It also included \$150,00 to install and upgrade street lights in Albuquerque’s International District and \$100,000 to help make the ABQRIDE bus service free to all youth.

A spokeswoman for Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller said the city is awaiting the governor’s action on other state funding bills to gauge the impact of Monday’s veto. For example, there is a pending capital outlay bill that includes other funding for Paseo del Norte and a number of other city projects.

“Our top priority this legislative session was public safety and we are anticipating those funds making a difference in central New Mexico. We will evaluate the full impact of the capital outlay bill after the deadline passes next week,” spokeswoman Jessie Damazyn said in a written statement late Monday.