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How will Amazon change Idaho's roads?

The growth spurred by the new facility in Nampa will add significant volume to roads that are already ill-equipped to handle current traffic levels.

NAMPA, Idaho — Starting next year, driving down Franklin Road in Nampa will look a lot different.

Amazon plans to open a 650,000-square-foot fulfillment center on the corner of Franklin and Star roads in Nampa in late 2020, its first facility in Idaho. [The Idaho Press reports](#) the center will create more than 1,000 jobs and generate nearly 7,000 vehicle trips per day during peak season.

The growth spurred by the facility will add significant volume to roads that are already ill-equipped to handle current traffic levels, according to Matt Stoll, executive director of the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, or Compass, the long-range planning agency for Ada and Canyon counties.

Even before Amazon announced its new center, Compass officials were projecting a steady rate of growth in this part of town. The Amazon development will speed up that growth enough to create challenges for the local transportation systems.

RELATED: [Amazon distribution center coming to Nampa in 2020, bringing 1,000 jobs](#)

Over a dozen transportation projects are planned within seven square miles of the fulfillment center in the next two years, according to a city map showing projects planned in the region.

A traffic impact study completed in 2018 identified more than 40 projects necessary in the area through 2030. The study identified these projects based on the expected impacts from Amazon — which at the time was known publicly only as “Project Bronco” — along with overall traffic growth and non-Amazon related projects in the pipeline.

Some of the projects include widening Franklin Road to five lanes, with two lanes in each direction and a center turn lane; converting the roundabout on Star and Franklin Roads to a signal intersection; and installing seven other roundabouts or traffic signals and six new intersections.

RELATED: [Nampa traffic improvements slated to cost \\$532M through 2040](#)

The Nampa Highway District is in charge of most of the roundabouts that will be installed near Amazon. Eric Shannon, district engineer, said only one of the proposed roundabouts could lead to houses being demolished, but the district has not decided if that's necessary. He would not specify which intersection meant.

Amazon has agreed to help pay for some of these projects, and will complete several others on its own. Many of these projects were already needed and in the works before Amazon came into the picture, and local agencies are responsible for funding and completing them, said Nampa's deputy public works director for transportation, Jeff Barnes.

BACKGROUND

Amazon officials entered a memorandum of understanding with the city of Nampa in February, which outlines responsibility between Amazon, Nampa and other local agencies for the necessary transportation projects through 2030. Amazon's impact area includes property owned by the city, the Nampa Highway District and the Idaho Transportation Department.

The memorandum specifies that Amazon will contribute \$5.5 million to the city for needs that will be determined. Barnes said Amazon plans to invest about \$14.2 million into transportation in Nampa over the next five years, which includes the \$5.5 million.

The \$5.5 million was originally intended to be used to improve traffic at the Garrity Interchange. However, ITD owns the interchange, and spokesman Jake Melder said an improvement project is not on the department's priority list.

Barnes said the funding could also be devoted to other projects, such as the Highway 16 extension, which ITD is also working on and is currently unfunded.

Although Nampa recently approved major increases to its impact fees, Barnes said Amazon will not have to pay the increased rates because the project was already in development before the city increased its rates. Amazon will still have to pay around \$260,000 in impact fees for streets, but Barnes said if the company had to pay the increased rates, that payment would have jumped to about \$4.1 million.

Amazon will also pay impact fees for police and fire-related infrastructure. Overall, Amazon is projected to pay about \$578,000 with Nampa's old impact fee rates. With the new fees, Amazon would have paid about \$5.4 million.

THE GROWTH PROBLEM

The land immediately neighboring Amazon is mostly vacant or farm land. However, Lactalis American Group's cheese factory sits just northeast of the site, the Ford Idaho Center, a large entertainment venue just down the road, and Saint Alphonsus' new hospital is only about two miles away.

In other states, Amazon fulfillment centers were built in more industrial areas, so there weren't many infrastructure improvements needed. In a December 2018 Idaho Press report, Troutdale, Oregon's Mayor Casey Ryan said if Troutdale's similarly sized Amazon fulfillment center was planned in an area like where Nampa's center is planned, he's not sure if city officials would have let Amazon proceed with the project.

"I'm not sure we would have done it at all," Ryan said.

Quick access to the interstate is a key feature Amazon officials value when choosing a location for a fulfillment center. Amazon spokesman Zeshan Kazmi said the company's first priority in determining a center's location is customer demand, followed by local support.

"Nampa checked off a lot of things we were looking for," Kazmi said.

Amazon vehicles will likely rely heavily on Garrity Interchange as the closest access point to Interstate 84 until Highway 16 is extended from Chinden Boulevard to the interstate, a nearly five-mile stretch.

RELATED: [Nampa aims to better sync traffic lights with new software](#)

Amazon's new center is projected to boost traffic by up to 10% at the Garrity Interchange during peak operating season — holiday months — according to the traffic impact study.

Stoll, with Compass, said the Garrity Interchange is already challenged by the current traffic volume. He said the infrastructure in the Treasure Valley is inadequate as a whole, and the state's continued population growth is only putting more strain on the system.

"Road projects don't happen overnight, but people moving here sure do," said Mary Ann Waldinger, principal planner for Compass.

Nampa recently surpassed 100,000 people, and Compass projects the city will reach 150,000 by 2040. Compass works with local agencies to make growth projections. Officials expected growth in northern Nampa, but the Amazon development was unexpected and threw off many of their projections, Waldinger said.

HIGHWAY 16

One project that could help relieve the pressure that Amazon will put on Nampa's transportation system is the Highway 16 extension, which will provide another access point to I-84 between the Ten Mile and C Interchanges. Nampa officials know this would be a boon for the city, and Barnes said they have expressed their wish to expedite the project's timeline.

Amazon officials have not reached to ITD out with the same request, according to Melder. However, he it's impossible to speed up the project without any funding.

"We're not speeding up anything, because there is nothing to speed up," he said.

The Highway 16 extension is expected to cost around \$450 million, based on 2019 dollar values, Meld said.

Idaho's funding for transportation is at a shortfall of \$235 million per year until 2040, Stoll said. Waldin said the Treasure Valley needs \$235 million every year to cover all unfunded transportation needs, including long-term unfunded projects and deferred maintenance on the existing transportation system

Without additional funding from another source, Stoll said it could be another 20 years until Highway 1 finished. Though Melder said Highway 16's construction is parsed out in stages, he did not refute Stoll prediction.

Waldinger said she expects Amazon to have the biggest impact on local roads in Nampa and Meridian particularly roads that are near the fulfillment center. She said drivers who use Franklin Road may notice increase in traffic once the center is in full swing.

The added congestion will likely create longer commute times and create safety concerns with a less reliable system, Stoll said.

In the next few years, the biggest challenge drivers will face is delays from construction in Amazon's im area, Stoll said.

"People are going to be extremely frustrated in the next year to four years," he said.

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

Amazon, the city of Nampa, ITD and the Nampa Highway District all have projects they plan to complete near the fulfillment center within the next several years. Barnes said Amazon's area of impact covers 7 square miles, stretching from Highway 20/26 to the north down to Amity Avenue to the south, and from Garrity Boulevard on the west to Ten Mile Road on the east.

Amazon will pay for and complete improvements at seven intersections near the fulfillment center, and Barnes said the company also plans to adjust the timing of the signals at some intersections to accommodate for additional traffic.

Amazon is not contributing funds to many of the other projects because those projects were already necessary and in progress before Amazon officials made plans to build a fulfillment center in Nampa, Barnes said.

Amazon did not trigger any projects that were necessary on state highways, Melder said, but ITD is planning a few projects near the fulfillment center, including intersection improvements at North Star R and Highway 20/26. Beyond that, the department is continuing work to expand I-84 and is gathering information for the Highway 16 extension.

The Nampa Highway District is planning to build a roundabout or traffic signal at five intersections in Nampa. Shannon said Amazon pledged \$850,000 of its \$5.5 million contribution to the city to cover a third of the cost of a roundabout at Robinson and Airport roads.

The remaining projects will be paid for through the district's normal revenue, which comes from local property taxes and the state gas tax, Shannon said. Even without the growth Amazon will bring, he said Nampa's population was growing enough to necessitate the projects.

"Most of these intersections we had to improve anyway," Shannon said.

The city of Nampa will help the highway district build a roundabout at the intersection of North Can Ad Road and Cherry Lane, but beyond that, the city isn't contributing much funding to transportation need

the area. Barnes said Nampa has committed about \$250,000 in impact fees for projects near Amazon

City officials are also working on a project to install an Intelligent Transportation System to connect Nampa's traffic signals to a feed in a remote location, where employees can monitor and change the t of the signals to benefit traffic flow and public safety. When implemented, Barnes said it will help reliev traffic in highly congested areas of the city, including near Amazon.

"We want our transportation systems to function for the people that live there," Barnes said.

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