

Nampa's population has doubled since 2000. The city's growth isn't stopping anytime soon.

The population of Nampa, ID, a Boise suburb, has doubled since 2000. Due to rampant growth and development, the city has become the largest in Canyon County, and the third-largest in Idaho. BY [KATE TALERICO](#)

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NAMPA

During her first two years in office, Mayor Debbie Kling has focused on transforming Nampa's downtown into a walkable and livable urban hub.

The freight trucks carrying loads of beets straight through downtown on State Highway 45 don't help.

Earlier this summer, Kling returned to an idea that's been on Nampa's back burner for years: rerouting the highway away from the city's urban core.





“We have big semis that are trying to traverse around our downtown,” Kling said. “At some point we need to look at another option.”

Just 18 miles long, Highway 45 begins at Highway 78 next to the Snake River and ends at Interstate 84. In South Nampa, it is 12th Avenue. Downtown, the road splits into two one-way segments on 2nd Street South and Nampa-Caldwell Boulevard and becomes the I-84 business loop.

COMPASS

“These roads were built way back in the day as part of the main street,” said ITD spokesman Jake Melder. Commercial development built up along the highway, which offered convenience.

For the last several years, that growth has overwhelmed the road. As of 2013, with just one lane in either direction and a shared turn lane, 7th Street saw 12,000 vehicles a day. COMPASS, the regional planning agency, expects that number to double by 2040 without any changes to Highway 45.

In 2013, Nampa began to consider rerouting the highway: From South Nampa heading north, the highway would follow 12th Avenue South until 7th Street. There it would turn left on 7th, then head north on Yale Street, flowing directly into Northside Boulevard and eventually intersecting with I-84.

That alternative route would alleviate traffic downtown, making it safer for pedestrians and bikers. As of 2013, 20,000 cars drove on Idaho 45 through downtown every day. By 2040, that number is expected to rise to 25,000 cars per day.

While downtown might be spared from freight trucks under this new route, that traffic would shift to 7th Street.

Rerouting the highway would transform that street. Rather than passing by downtown coffee-store loungers and window shoppers, the highway would cut past green lawns and front porches of some of the [poorest families](#) in the city.

The city is conducting a \$54,000 study to understand the costs and benefits of rerouting the highway.

“Is this something we should be doing that is good for the community?” asked Daniel Badger, a city engineer. “As we go talking to the state about how we do this, one of the first things they’ll ask is, is there a benefit to this?”

Badger said the city could consider other routes. Don’t expect to see bulldozers anytime soon. Because the highway is under the jurisdiction of the Idaho Transportation Department, the city still needs to persuade the state to fund the rerouting, he said.

“It’s unlikely that the city would ever fund the entire project,” Badger said. “It is not inexpensive.”

As of 2014, COMPASS estimated that the project would cost \$25 million. Construction costs have increased since then.

Melder said ITD supports Nampa’s further research into the benefits of shifting the road.

The project isn’t currently within the [top 10 priorities for ITD’s Southwest Idaho region](#). By conducting a cost-benefit analysis, the city could show enough evidence to elevate its importance. The city expects to complete the report by November.

Nampa has also invested in other infrastructure projects to make downtown more walkable. In 2018, the city [ripped up its downtown](#) for a months-long construction project to widen sidewalks and plant trees.