

## Our View: Now is the time to figure out if we need expressway

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Growth is accelerating south of Boise, Meridian and Nampa, and Treasure Valley land prices are rising fast. The time has come for residents and elected leaders to consider whether to buy land for a proposed expressway that could one day provide an alternative to Interstate 84.

The staff of the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho supports an expressway along Kuna-Mora Road to ease congestion that is sure to come someday in the unincorporated areas about 10 miles south of Boise, Meridian and Nampa.

Kuna-Mora Road and its Canyon County extension, Bowmont Road, run through little more than sage country and irrigated farmland today. But the future promises development. At least six new planned communities already are planned in Ada County north and south of Kuna-Mora Road.

An I-84 bypass has been talked about since the 1960s to benefit long-distance truckers. But nonlocal truck traffic accounts for less than 10 percent of I-84's 100,000 trips a day in the Boise area, COMPASS says, so a bypass has been hard to justify. With local growth, though, COMPASS Executive Director Matt Stoll says an expressway one day will be needed.

"We need to keep it on the radar screen," he said.

To connect with I-84 west of Boise and Meridian would require a north-south segment, too. The Idaho Transportation Department wants to extend Idaho 16 from its southern terminus at State Street south to the interstate. An additional Idaho 16 extension south to Kuna-Mora Road would be needed, perhaps along McDermott Road. West of that, COMPASS envisions Bowmont Road becoming a four- or five-lane arterial highway to Idaho 45 in Nampa.

Planners once considered a bypass along Deer Flat Road three miles north of Kuna-Mora Road, but development there has made an expressway impractical, COMPASS officials say.

An expressway would be many years away. Meanwhile, transportation agencies are moving ahead with plans for a \$104 million extension and widening of Lake Hazel Road in Ada County and its extension, Greenhurst Road in Canyon County, to join with Gowen Road and link to I-84 by the Boise Factory Outlets. These two-lane roads would become five lanes from Happy Valley Road in Nampa to I-84. A study to determine exact alignments is under way.

Lake Hazel and Greenhurst are destined to become major arterial routes. COMPASS says nearly 3,000 new residential and commercial lots within a mile of Lake Hazel are likely to be developed within five years.

With Kuna-Mora Road, there's still an opportunity to plan for a bypass someday.

The chance to acquire land inexpensively won't last forever. "We probably need to look very, very quickly at an alignment and environmental study on this road to protect it," said Charles Trainor, COMPASS' planning director. "Once the development rush is on, it's too late."

Planners estimate a study would cost \$2 million; they hope the state will pay. They also recommend spending \$6 million to complete gaps in Bowmont and Kuna-Mora roads to carry traffic for the next decade or two. There is no estimate yet of the cost of acquiring land to hold it for an eventual expressway.

Effective planning for new roads must consider regional and long-term needs, not just development in the next few years. There are never enough highway funds to go around, and long-term needs take a back seat to more pressing concerns.

But county and highway commissioners in Ada and Canyon counties, and the Idaho Transportation Board, should consider whether an expressway will be needed one day and how it might be paid for.