

# Circuit of the Americas seeks assistance from Travis County for roadwork

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Circuit of the Americas officials are asking Travis County to pay for at least some new road construction in the vicinity of their \$300 million racetrack and entertainment complex southeast of Austin.

The work would include widening Elroy Road to four lanes and the extension of little-used Kellam Road to Pearce Lane to create a new way to get to the track property.

"We are proposing to start work on the road improvements now, with (Circuit of the Americas) paying the upfront expense. We are also proposing that Travis County would then provide COTA with a performance-based reimbursement for the county road improvements once they were complete. The percentage of reimbursement would be determined with county officials," said Julie Loignon, a spokeswoman for the circuit.

Travis County Commissioner Sarah Eckhardt said it isn't clear exactly what the circuit is seeking and added, "This looks like a very ambitious business proposal that is having trouble meeting its financial obligation. And so they are looking to the county to subsidize a portion of their startup costs."

The 3.4-mile circuit is scheduled to host its first Formula One Grand Prix on Nov. 18. That would be the first F1 race in the United States in five years, and it's been estimated that as many as 120,000 fans could attend.

Travis County officials have previously expressed concern about transportation to and from the isolated site, saying traffic delays for that Sunday race could be as long as 12 hours. Circuit officials have not dismissed the potential problems but have estimated delays closer to three hours.

For months, the county and the circuit officials have debated who should pay — and how much they should pay — for an estimated \$8 million in road improvements for the area.

The county has said that it would pay for resurfacing McAngus and Elroy roads. The work on McAngus has already begun. There is construction going on at Elroy Road, but according to Bill Farr at Cash Construction, that is for a 30-inch water line parallel to Elroy Road.

Farr said, however, that it might be possible for the work being done on the water line to be used as a base for widening Elroy Road.

Circuit officials would like more than a mile of Elroy to be widened, from McAngus Road to the track's northern entrance. The circuit would also like to see the county pay for some of that widening, citing the potential economic benefit to the area.

The county has said it will pay to repave Kellam Road, if the circuit then extends that road to Pearce Lane, which connects with Texas 130. Kellam is currently a road to nowhere, passing by a few houses and farmhouses before coming to an end.

Currently, two tracts of land stand between Kellam and Pearce. Weldon Copeland of Rainbow Properties said someone with the circuit has an option to buy an 82-acre plot at Kellam's end.

There's also a more than 600-acre tract owned by the state's General Land Office.

Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson has been one of the most vocal critics of the state's pledged financial support for the race. However, on Tuesday the office's School Land Board unanimously approved the sale of more than 6 acres of that tract — presumably enough for a road to be built if the financing can be agreed upon.

In his application for the development incentive, circuit President Steve Sexton wrote, "While we are asking for road incentives, you may still decide that the value of our proposal to county citizens is worthy of an abatement or rebate also."

Contact John Maher at 445-3956 Additional material from staff reporter Tony Plohetski

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