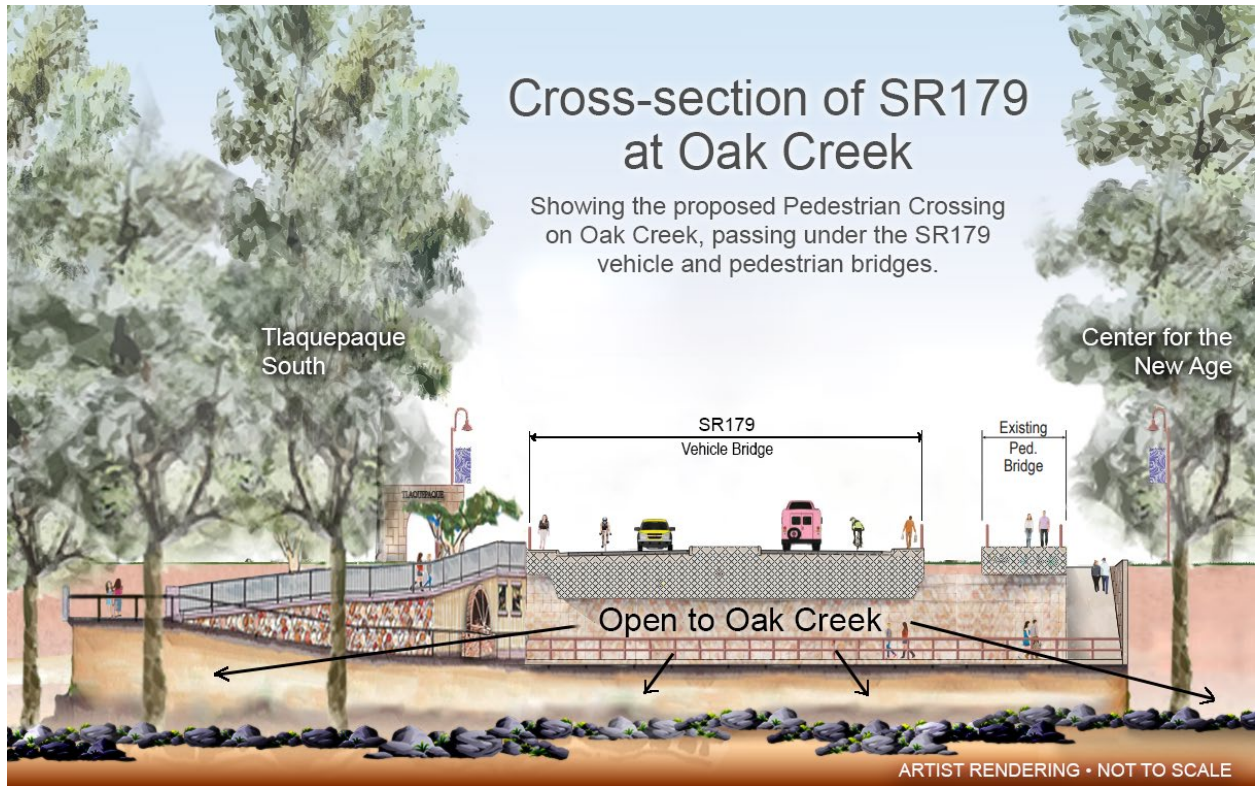


City Talk for July 12, 2023
City Manager's Office
J. Andy Dickey, deputy city manager

Insight on the Pedestrian Crossing on Oak Creek Project



Rendering by Rob MacMullan

After high stream flows occurred in Oak Creek this past winter, there has been quite a buzz about how the city's proposed Pedestrian Crossing on Oak Creek Project – an open air pathway for pedestrians and cyclists to use under State Route (SR) 179 along the creek – is a waste of money and nobody will use it. There are two primary misconceptions that need to be clarified before one may begin to understand the value of the project.

First, why would anyone walk so far out of their way when you can currently, quickly walk directly across the highway, to get from "A to B"? Well, in short you won't always be able to just quickly walk across the highway, as I describe in detail below.

Second, we often hear the way to solve congestion issues on SR 179 is to close the surface crossing connecting two shopping areas. While this appears to be the sole contributor to congestion on SR 179, it is not. One significant contributor is the Schnebly Hill Roundabout, with left turns and U-turns choking the capacity of this single-lane roundabout. Other sources of friction leading to congestion, are the same as those we address in Uptown like left turns, the number of street crossings, jaywalking, and control issues at driveways, etc. Congestion in the Y Roundabout also contributes to congestion in the SR 179 corridor. I cannot go into detail, due to the space restriction of this article, but I can say the city has projects in process that focus on reducing congestion due to these friction sources.

There will be a reduction of pedestrian volume in the surface SR 179 crossing with the opening of this underpass. Not only will this facility provide an additional crossing option, resulting in a split in crossing

volumes, but once open, incentives and disincentives will be added to gain optimal utilization. This includes longer wait times at the surface crossing than if you were to use the underpass with Traffic Control Assistants (TCA's) at the surface crossing, signs encouraging use of the underpass and aesthetic elements of the path drawing people to a more enjoyable experience, compared to the highway crossing.

By drawing folks to the underpass, with the creek view, aesthetic/history elements and time incentives compared to the surface crossing, it will activate the space under the bridge. This has been proven in other areas to reduce the negative element of needing to walk longer by filling the space with desired activities. In addition, with the city now having access control in this area, it will be actively monitored.

Constructing the underpass allows the ability to test the operation of the surface crossing rather than relying on modeling solely. Not only does this testing become possible, but it is also a requirement of the ADOT permit for this project. Periodic testing will be required once the underpass is built, which will determine if additional improvements are needed for the surface crossing, which could range from no additional improvements, to a signalized crossing, to full closure of the crossing. Time will tell if ADOT supports the closure of the surface crossing.

With the closures for testing, a new level of traffic modeling and a new and better understanding of congestion events will be gained. While our staff and consultants believe our traffic modeling is pretty accurate, nothing beats real-world testing. There are scenarios we'll be able to test, which we're not aware of now, and as other nearby roadway projects are completed and traffic volumes increase, the overall traffic model will change. Once other congestion relief projects are complete, further improvements on the SR 179 corridor will become more important to reduce congestion in the overall street network. To be clear, this underpass project clears the path to ultimately ensuring traffic efficiency is gained for the SR 179 corridor.

We've heard concerns from the community that this path will flood. It will, but the path will be high enough that it will only flood during our worst storms like we saw this winter. In these types of events, like low water crossings or paths in other areas built in floodways, the path will be closed for the short duration of the flood and be built to withstand those flows.

The underpass is a facility that provides improvements in-line with many city priorities outlined in transportation, multimodal and sustainability plans, and provides the start to an eventual public access creek walk, a first of its kind.

To get an update on this project or any other Sedona in Motion (SIM) projects, plan to watch the August 9th City Council meeting where we'll be giving our quarterly SIM update.