

Town of Crested Butte Releases 60% Design for Red Lady and Highway 135 Roundabout

Crested Butte, CO — The Town of Crested Butte has reached the 60% design milestone for the planned roundabout at Red Lady Avenue and Highway 135. This project is a partnership between the Town, the Gunnison Watershed School District, Gunnison County, CDOT, and the project design team at Kimley Horn. Construction is anticipated to begin in Q4 2026 with the bulk of construction in 2027. The construction project is funded in part through a grant of \$2.2M from the FHWA through the Safe Streets for All program.

This intersection has long been recognized as one of the more challenging locations in town for both safety and daily traffic operations, especially during school drop off and pick up times. The peanut-shaped roundabout design is intended to enhance the functionality of the two Red Lady Avenue intersections while significantly improving pedestrian safety. This design provides safer crossing opportunities for pedestrians and reduces traffic speeds. Creating a secure and efficient environment for all road users.

The updated design reflects traffic modeling, engineering analysis, and feedback from community members and partner agencies. A key priority throughout the design process has been improving overall safety and improving connections for people walking, biking, or rolling in this area of town while maintaining slow but more efficient flow of traffic through this intersection.

What the 60% Design Includes

- Slower vehicular speeds and fewer conflict points than the existing two Red Lady Avenue intersections.
- Shorter pedestrian crossing distances and improved walking connections between the school, Town Park, and surrounding neighborhoods
- An intersection control that can accommodate future traffic growth if volumes increase over time
- Enhanced pedestrian features like rectangular rapid flashing beacon (RRFB)

Pedestrian Crossings and Connections

The design includes pedestrian crossings at every leg of the roundabout except the south leg across Highway 135, where there are currently no pedestrian connection points.

These crossings are intended to improve access between Town Park, the Perimeter Trail and Red Lady Open Space, the school campus, and surrounding neighborhoods. They are

meant to provide more mobility options for people moving through this part of town in a safe and intuitive way.

Roundabout crossings are also inherently safer for pedestrians than crossings at a traditional four-way intersection. Instead of navigating multiple lanes of moving traffic at once, pedestrians only cross one direction of traffic at a time and interact with vehicles moving at much slower speeds.

To start, these pedestrian crossings will be maintained during the non-winter seasons and will not be plowed or maintained in the winter, similar to the Knight and Dragon crosswalk and sidewalk today.

These new crossings do not replace or supersede the designated Safe Route to School, which remains the Belleview Avenue crossing and path through Town Park. That route will continue to be the primary pedestrian path for students and an alternative winter path for others traveling through this area.

Understanding the Right Turn Lane Question

One of the most common questions about the design has been the removal of the dedicated right turn lane from Highway 135 onto Red Lady Avenue.

Traffic studies show that this right turn movement is not the source of the current problems at the intersection. The primary issue today comes from vehicles attempting to turn left from Red Lady Avenue onto Highway 135. Drivers must wait for gaps in fast moving highway traffic, which creates delay, backups, and safety concerns. The roundabout directly addresses this problem by allowing vehicles to enter the flow of traffic in a controlled, low speed environment with far fewer conflict points.

Based on CDOT traffic counts and projected growth, a dedicated northbound right turn lane on SH 135 is not warranted at this time. Including one now would also create significant challenges for snow plowing and winter maintenance. What the design does include is a new eastbound right turn lane on Red Lady Ave into the school parking lot. We have already seen improved traffic flows into the school lot with the recent redesign and improved vehicle queuing and drop-off areas. Adding the dedicated right turn into the lot on Red Lady will provide an additional relief value on busy days and allow the roundabout to continue flowing smoothly.

Importantly, the design preserves the space needed to add a right turn lane in the future if traffic volumes increase and CDOT determines it is warranted. The geometry and utility layout will allow that to happen without redesigning the entire intersection.

Capacity, Traffic Flow, and Future Growth

The roundabout has been designed using conservative growth projections and is intended to accommodate future traffic needs while improving how this intersection works today.

One benefit of the roundabout is that it will help break up vehicle platoons entering town. As cars slow and yield while navigating the roundabout, traffic naturally spaces out. This can provide better timing and less stacking pressure as vehicles approach the Belleview intersection.

There will still be busy periods where congestion occurs and traffic may back up toward or into the roundabout, similar to what is experienced today during peak times such as the Fourth of July or busy events. The roundabout is specifically designed to handle peak AM and PM school traffic flows safely and more efficiently than the current intersection.

If future growth and its associated traffic entering or traveling through the town grows over time beyond these conservative projections, the Belleview intersection and the four-way stop will likely need to be evaluated in the future as part of the larger transportation network through Crested Butte.

Transit Expansion Opportunity

The Red Lady roundabout creates a timely opportunity to expand winter transit service to the east side of town, advancing goals identified in both the Town's Transportation Mobility Plan and Mountain Express's five-year service plan. The roundabout will make this expansion feasible by allowing buses to safely turn left onto Red Lady Avenue from Sixth Street, opening access to this part of town for the first time. Improving access to nearby residential neighborhoods and using the Community School parking lot as a weekend and holiday park-n-ride for skiers would bring transit closer to where people live while offering a convenient option for skier and in-town parking. This approach supports greater mobility choices and helps reduce parking pressure in Crested Butte's residential areas during peak periods.

Look for community engagement opportunities in fall 2026 as this route expansion is planned further.

Next Steps

The project team will continue advancing the design toward final plans in June/July. Additional information, including updated graphics, project cost, funding sources, and construction timing, will be shared with the public as the project progresses. More discussion will take place this year with Town Council and the community about what will go in the center of the roundabout so it serves as a thoughtful gateway and reflects Crested Butte's authentic sense of place.

Stay up to date with the latest news at this link:

<https://townofcrestedbutte.colorado.gov/red-lady-roundabout-project> or contact planning@crestedbutte-co.gov.