

## **NAFTA influencing bypass decisions**

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Recently, the impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement on the export of American jobs has drawn a lot of national media attention.

Few, however, are aware that NAFTA is about to have a major impact on the economy of Sandpoint, Idaho. The Idaho Transportation Department, using NAFTA-backed federal funds, is about to build a north-south trade route through the center of Sandpoint. They are calling it the Sand Creek Byway and, not only will it contribute to the trade imbalance and export of U.S. jobs, it will also have a negative impact on the local, tourist-based economy.

The limited access, elevated highway will destroy the natural scenic beauty of Sand Creek and form a barrier between the town and its most valuable summer asset -- beautiful Lake Pend Oreille. A noisy elevated truck route between the town and the lake will have a long-term stifling effect on tourism while the expected three-year construction, set to begin this summer, is bound to choke some local establishments out of business.

Make no mistake about it, the "by way," referred to locally as the Sagle-to-Wal-Mart freeway, will contribute nothing to the long-term economy of Sandpoint. Nor will the exorbitantly expensive proposed second Long Bridge, which is being planned to route even more traffic along the Sand Creek corridor.

Eventually, a west side bypass crossing the river at a much narrower location makes sense. Meanwhile, a short connection between First and Superior and Fifth and Pine could route truck traffic around town using the already widened Fifth Avenue. And the carnage on Highway 95 could be greatly reduced if ITD would repaint the lines, install a couple strategically placed stoplights and reduce the speed limit to 55. The slower speed limit would only increase travel time between Sandpoint and Coeur d'Alene by about six minutes.

Unfortunately, none of these common sense approaches will be considered as long as ITD is in bed with NAFTA.

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