



SAVE THE DELLS'
Alternatives to Widening State Route 89
Through the Granite Dells Narrows

*The Granite Dells is something really special, and we must be on our guard
to make sure it stays special.*

City representatives, proponents of the widening the roadway, and certain members of the public have characterized the Dells Narrows of State Route 89 (SR89), the high rocky part of the roadway, as a foe needing to be managed by blasting and widening to enhance motorists' experience and safety.

The facts about the importance of this roadway as a regional landmark, the level of destruction that would occur, and the need for changing it are being distorted. For instance, descriptions of wait times at intersections are inflated, and words like "gridlock" are used in error to characterize the driving experience. Many of us experience traffic on SR89 through the Narrows, as reasonable and enjoy the view as part of the Prescott experience. Yes, improvements could be made, but without widening through the Narrows.

According to the city staff's own data, traffic safety incidents are concentrated at the roundabouts, not in the Narrows.

The City of Prescott Public Works Department is planning a Centralization project that includes needed effluent line upgrading and replacement, some along the SR89 roadway in the segment from Phippen Trail to the Willow Lake Road roundabout.

The SR89 widening concept has been added as a supposed point of practicality because of certain necessary road disruption due to the Centralization, however, we were told that **the Centralization Project can proceed without widening the roadway.**



Description of Dells Narrows Intersections

We define the Dells Narrows as the approximate 5,500-foot segment from just south of the Granite Dells Road intersection north to the intersection serving the 89er Mobile Home Park.

There are six intersections within the 5,500-foot rockiest stretch of SR89 that would be potentially subjected to blasting for widening. We've listed these from south to north.

1. The intersection with Granite Dells Road to the east, which provides access to the Flume Trail Trailhead and the Granite Gardens neighborhood, and Calvary Road on the west
2. The intersection with Twisted Trail to the west, which also provides access to the Ecosa-Prescott College property
3. The intersection with Boulder Creek Lane on the west and Granite Gardens Drive on the east that provides access to the Granite Gardens Trails and the High Rappel Dells
4. The intersection with Old Highway 89A on the east side, which is the planned entrance to the Regional Park at Granite Dells Gateway Park
5. The Three Sisters Consignment store entrance to the east
6. The intersection serving the 89er Mobile Home Park to the east

Alternatives to Widening

Council was introduced to the widening concept as presented to them and the public in June 2023 (see [City of Prescott Study Session minutes](#)) for the first time. At this study session, neither Council or the public was offered any alternatives by staff, and the Council didn't request them. To date, the public hasn't seen any options to the city's concept.


The city's proposal to widen has been met with significant, public backlash.

We think the best decisions for the community are collaborative and discussed in a public setting. We object to the proposed **blasting, coloring, and applying artificial rock surfaces** to the boulders without any options or alternatives being offered.

We offer alternatives here based on our own experiences and observations and from discussions with and comments from community members.

Smaller, less intrusive, pragmatic, and less costly changes are the answer.

Alternatives and Rationale or Description

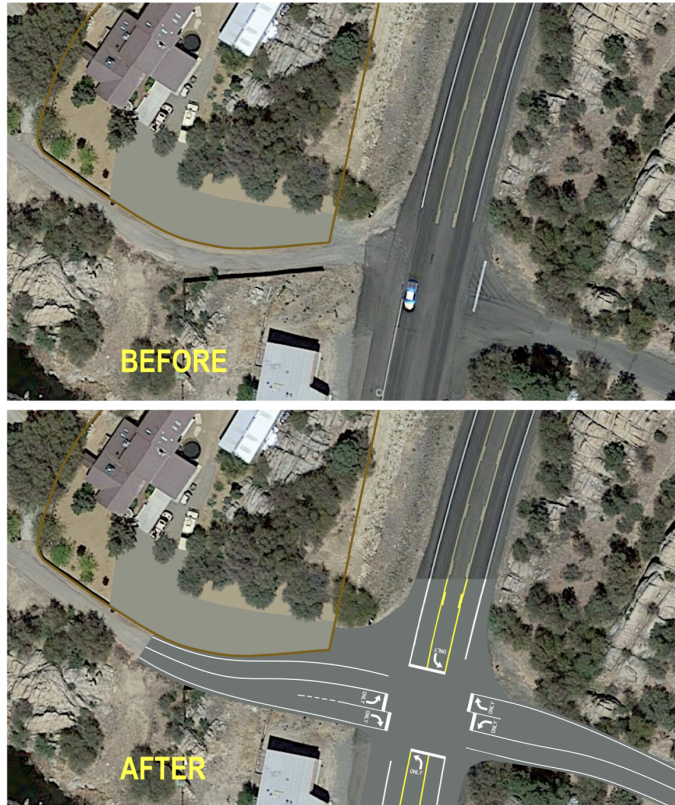
Alternative	Rationale, description, and/or reference
Don't widen through the Narrows.	<p>State Route 89 passes through a beautiful part of the Dells, and it is the only highway from which people can see this beauty up close from their cars. Widening will greatly diminish the value of this roadway without benefit to traffic movement or safety. The principle known as "induced demand" tells us that "increasing the capacity of a roadway encourages more and more people to use that roadway until eventually the traffic congestion returns." (Volker, Jamey, and Susan Handy. 2023. Increasing Highway Capacity Induces More Auto Travel. https://doi.org/10.7922/G22805Z9).</p>
<p>Install signage along the roadway before the Phippen and Watson Lake roundabouts to alert motorists to the scenic road ahead and to <i>enjoy the view!</i></p>	<p>Example: "Now entering Scenic Highway 89. Slow down and enjoy the view."</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>Sign by Wendover Art Group</p>

Install smart traffic lights.

Lights at the intersections could remain green for SR89 until traffic needing to turn is sensed by lane sensors. Then the lights could go red briefly for SR89, or only one direction of SR89, depending on which turn lane the vehicle is in. That traffic would get only a green turn arrow, left or right.

This illustrates improvement of just one of the intersections, at Granite Dells Road, to accommodate a smart traffic light. This solution maintains features of the property to the west.

Highway 89 Example Smart Light Intersection with Granite Dells Rd on East and Calvary Rd on West
Light would remain green for north and southbound traffic on 89 until changing only as needed for traffic approaching from east or west or turning left from 89 (might go red for 89 in only one direction).



Request traffic engineering study and a current cost analysis.

(FAQ: Traffic Engineering. ADOT. n.d. <https://azdot.gov/business/engineering-and-construction/traffic/faq-traffic-engineering>. Accessed 2023 Oct 14).

Request an ADOT safety assessment similar to the one done in Yarnell, detail areas of safety concerns, and include supporting data.

An ADOT safety study will engage the public and provide data so the best decisions can be made (FAQ - SR 89 Yarnell. ADOT. n.d. <https://azdot.gov/projects/northwest-district-projects/sr-89-yarnell-road-safety-assessment/faq-sr-89-yarnell-rsa>. Form at <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1er24Vf9GkWjO0D4ObcR3WGW9Rr8aGNQo/view?usp=sharing>. Accessed 2023 Oct 14).

Clean-up line-of-sight visibility for traffic waiting to enter SR89.

Making minor changes to certain intersections, such as realigning or restriping the roadway lanes or removing

vegetation and visual obstructions would have major safety benefits.

Example of re-striping roadway:



Where appropriate and without widening, add more center turn lanes (two-way left turn lanes).

After a stop, motorists could make a right turn from a side road or driveway into a merge lane, which would increase safety and minimize wait times to turn.

Center turn lanes provide safe areas in which to slow down before a left turn from SR89 or to drive into when turning left from a side street or driveway (Arizona Drivers License Manual. 2023, page 37.

<https://apps.azdot.gov/files/mvd/mvd-forms-lib/99-0117.pdf>.

Accessed 2023 Oct 22).

These lanes are not for passing, for thru traffic or to accelerate from in order to merge with thru traffic.

<p>Avoid building roundabouts.</p>	<p>Roundabouts create continuous traffic flow, which makes it difficult to merge or turn into other access points. Constructing them involves taking of private property for up to a 200-foot-diameter roundabout and would include lighting and gravelling. The photo below is for example only.</p>  <p>(David McAtee, Construction at Pioneer Parkway Roundabout and Commerce Drive, 2022, Jul 18. Prescott eNews. https://prescottnews.com/index.php/2022/07/18/construction-at-pioneer-parkway-roundabout-and-commerce-drive/. Accessed 2023, Oct 14).</p>
<p>Construct flex lanes (reverse lanes).</p>	<p>The flex lane system uses the inside median as an additional travel lane during peak traffic periods, typically during weekday morning and afternoon rush hours. This is a common and efficient traffic-flow strategy. (7th Street and 7th Avenue Reverse Traffic Lanes. n.d. https://www.phoenix.gov/streets/projects/7th-street-and-7th-avenue-reverse-lanes. Accessed 2023 Oct 14).</p>
<p>Add traffic-calming elements.</p>	<p>Traffic calming is the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, such as speeding, and improve conditions for motorized and non-motorized road users. (Traffic Calming to Slow Vehicle Speeds, U.S. Department of Transportation. n.d. https://www.transportation.gov/mission/health/Traffic-Calming-to-Slow-Vehicle-Speeds. Accessed 2023 Oct 14).</p>
<p>Relocate or redesign Watson Lake Park roundabout.</p>	<p>This roundabout is smaller than normal because it was retrofitted for a smaller space and is asked to manage a complex set of movements from Watson Lake, Willow Lake Road and adjacent businesses. The traffic at this roundabout causes slowing on SR89 at certain times, which is not related to the width of the roadway through the Narrows but to congested activities that occur here.</p>

Rename Willow Creek Road “Highway 89”; give “Scenic 89” through the Dells another name.	It’s not uncommon for roadway names to be changed by municipalities. (Numbering Arizona’s Highways. ADOT. 2014 Mar 5. https://azdot.gov/blog-article/numbering-arizonas-highways . Accessed 2023 Oct 14). Business bypasses are sometimes named in this manner.
Expand Willow Lake Road to four lanes.	Providing more efficient east-west movement from Willow Creek Road to 89 is a much better option because it will serve more people.

Compared to the city’s original concept, the alternatives in this document

- eliminate mass destruction of the gateway to the Granite Dells, to Watson Lake, to Willow Lake, and downtown Prescott;
- are less expensive;
- are safer by keep traffic lanes to two plus a turn lane, which moderates motorist speed and increases safety;
- eliminate an “all or nothing” approach;
- may protect wildlife by maintaining road width and slower speeds;
- provide more safety by breaking up traffic flow unlike roundabouts that create more continuous flow;
- strategically place smart traffic lights that initiate breaks in traffic flow,
- eliminate the need for more roundabouts, which take over a tremendous amount of space and are where most accidents occur.

Other segments and intersections within this roadway need attention and thoughtful public planning, also. We also want full consideration and discussion about the entire section of roadway from Phippen Trail to Willow Lake Road and the other intersections of this roadway not part of the Narrows, such as the private driveway south of Granite Dells Road, Kring Drive, East Gate, driveways from apartments to the west Lillian Lane, the driveway to the Lakeview area, and Canyon View Drive.

Conclusion

In summary, we feel that widening the highway through the Narrows would greatly diminish its value as a scenic highway and provide no safety improvement because it would encourage higher speeds and dangerous lane changing maneuvers within the Narrows. We propose options that would increase safety and maintain the scenic value of this iconic segment of roadway while lowering construction costs.

We welcome dialog with the staff, Council, and public about this issue or any others we are involved in.

Joanne Oellers
 Chair, Save the Dells
info@savethedells.org