

PRESS-REGISTER

Royal Street to flow 2 ways

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Staff Reporter

Wednesday is the day traffic will begin flowing both ways on Royal Street in downtown Mobile, said Bill Metzger, the city's traffic engineer.

City officials and downtown advocates hope the long-planned move will be the first in a series of two-way conversions. They believe the changes will make Mobile's core more welcoming to drivers and pedestrians, thereby prompting new development.

The city promised to allow traffic both ways on Royal to improve access to the RSA Battle House Tower complex, which is still under construction.

The street is currently one-way northbound from Government Street to its north end at Congress Street.

The city also agreed to make Dauphin and St. Francis streets two-way between Royal and Water streets to help the office tower and hotel.

That conversion will happen later this spring, because St. Francis is still closed by construction, and the city only awarded the contract to alter the Water Street intersections this month.

The city is spending up to \$800,000 to do all the work on Royal and the side streets, Metzger said.

The Royal street work

involved seven new traffic signals, but Metzger said much of the work was done cheaply because the city was able to use wiring and other infrastructure already in place.

Two-way traffic is likely to spread to more downtown streets in coming years.

Mayor Sam Jones has pledged to allow westbound traffic on St. Louis Street by the end of the year, Metzger said.

The remainder of St. Francis Street, currently one-way westbound, and the blocks of St. Joseph Street that are currently one-way southbound could also be changed in coming years.

Two-way traffic was eliminated on many downtown Mobile streets decades ago in an effort to speed cars to their destination. Such moves were common nationwide, but many cities are beginning to reintroduce two-way traffic again.

Elizabeth Sanders, executive director of the Downtown Mobile Alliance, a public-private agency that promotes the area, said that people who are unfamiliar with downtown are put off by the one-way grid.

"People tell me all the time, 'I hate coming downtown, with all those one-way streets,'" Sanders said.

She also said that two-way streets will slow traffic, making the area more friendly for pedestrians.

The city hosted a walkability audit by national expert Dan Burden last week, who agreed during his tour that two-way streets are much better for foot traffic.

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