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Famous Landmark At Risk With Highway Project

It was an important landmark for western pioneers traveling on the Santa Fé Trail, the Point of Rocks at the Dodge City limits which now holds the city's welcome sign.

It indicated to wagon trains that they were headed in the right direction, but a plan to widen Highway 50 between Dodge and Cimarron could mean its demise.

"Some of it was taken in a highway project in the 1980s, and that apparently leaves it free game to take the rest of it," said Bill Bunyan, Dodge City's chapter president of the Santa Fé Trail Association. "And we do not think that's right; we'd like to protect at least as much of it as possible."

The most budget-friendly plan to make the 13 mile stretch of Highway 50 between Cimarron and Dodge City into a divided four-lane expressway involves following the highway's current path, but there is no federal protection in place for the Point of Rocks, meaning it could be legally removed.

Kansas Department of Transportation engineers says they're working to find the best route.

"What they're trying to figure out is there a way to build the highway that we want to build and through that location without having to move the highway somewhere else or not build it at all," said Kirk Hutchinson, KDOT.

Members of the Santa Fé Trail Association met with KDOT to voice their concerns and are hoping they can come to a compromise that will save the site.

"We've lived in western Kansas this long with nothing but a passing lane every 20 to 30 miles, and if the busiest part of the highway is between Cimarron and Dodge and there's not a passing lane right now, looks to me like we can maintain a two lane for half a mile so that we can save a significant site," said Mike Strodman of the Santa Fé Trail Association.

KDOT says it's still very early in the design process and it could still take up more than a year until the design is finalized.

AP/KSN