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August 13, 2013	WJBC and www.wjbc.com	Panelists discuss Eastside Highway with public



\$10.4M east-side highway study approved

By M.K. Guetersloh | mkguetersloh@pantagraph.com | Posted: Tuesday, June 15, 2010 11:01 am

BLOOMINGTON -- A four-year study will begin this summer to determine the location of an east-side highway.

The McLean County Board on Tuesday approved a \$10.4 million contract with Clark-Dietz, a Champaign-based engineering firm, to conduct the next phase of the proposed highway that would connect interstates 55 and 74 east of Bloomington-Normal.

The 11-8 vote shows not all members think the money should be spent on the highway.

George Wendt of Bloomington, who was among "no" votes, said he was frustrated with state and federal governments spending money they don't have.

The Illinois Department of Transportation set aside \$13.6 million to fund the next step in locating the highway.

Paul Segobiano of Bloomington voted "no" after questioning the number of jobs the spending would create. An estimate was not immediately available.

In March, the board voted 9-6 to accept the state's money for the project.

Last year, Clark-Dietz completed a feasibility study that determined a general route for the highway, which will be about 500 feet wide. That \$1.2 million study suggested the route would be about a half-mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and would be a controlled-access route similar to U.S. 51 south of Bloomington.

This study will better define the route, narrowing it to a path about 300 feet wide. The study also will include an environmental study.

Board member Stan Hoselton of Lexington said, at best guess, the study will be completed in 2014.

Engineers believe it likely will be 10 to 20 years before construction begins, if the project is approved. The \$260 million to \$320 million cost would require significant federal funding to complete, county engineers said.



Volunteers needed for local highway study

By M.K. Guetersloh | mkguetersloh@pantagraph.com | Posted: Wednesday, August 25, 2010 9:53 pm

NORMAL -- Engineers conducting a four-year study of a proposed east-side highway are looking for volunteers to participate in a community work group.

On Wednesday, Jerry Payonk of Champaign-based engineers Clark Dietz presented a 45-minute overview of the next phase of study for the proposed highway that will run east of Bloomington-Normal and connect Interstate 55 near Towanda with Interstate 74 near Downs.

About 60 people attended the meeting held at Normal Community High School, 3900 E. Raab Road.

"This does not mean construction will start in 2014 when this study is completed," Payonk said. "If all the funding was lined up and ready, we would still eight years away from construction and the funding is not there."

The meeting marks the start of a \$10.4 million environmental study funded by state money and conducted by McLean County, the city of Bloomington, the town of Normal and the Illinois Department of Transportation.

As part of the study, the engineers want about 20 to 25 community volunteers to help provide public involvement in the project.

But the highway remains a tough sell to some area residents. During Payonk's presentation one man asked about whether the issue could be decided by a referendum.

The proposed highway likely would cost \$260 million to \$320 million to build and it would be completed in about 20 years. Payonk said the construction project would have to be divided into stages with sections of the road built one at a time.

Last year, Clark Dietz completed a feasibility study that determined a general route for the highway, which will be about 500 feet wide. That \$1.2 million study suggested the route would be about a half-mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and would be a controlled-access route similar to U.S. 51 south of Bloomington.

This study will better define the route, narrowing it to a path about 300 feet wide. The study includes a report on how the highway would change the human and natural environment along that path.

10/23/2010

A4 • The Pantagraph • Saturday

Daily Digest

NEWS IN BRIEF

B-N traffic surveys to begin

BLOOMINGTON — Workers with Clark-Dietz in Champaign will be handing out traffic surveys at intersections on the east side of the Twin Cities starting Monday.

The engineering firm is conducting an in-depth analysis of traffic patterns as part of its work on a four-year environmental study for the proposed eastside highway.

Officials from the engineering firm said workers would be at intersections as weather permits. The surveys include a few questions and a postage-paid envelope so people can send the surveys back to Clark-Dietz.

Comments sought today on east-side highway study

Purpose and need report to be presented

By M.K. Guetersloh

mkguetersloh@pantagraph.com

NORMAL — Residents who want to voice their opinion on whether an east-side highway should be built will have the chance to comment on the highway study from 6 to 8 p.m. today at Normal Community High School, 3900 E. Raab Road.

Clark Dietz, the engineering

firm conducting a four-year environmental study of the proposed highway, will present the purpose and need report for the study during an open house-style forum. Public comment on the purpose and need report will be collected for two weeks after today's meeting.

McLean County Highway Engineer Eric Schmitt said public opinion is critical to the project.

"Part of the process is whether the community thinks we need to build this (highway) on the east side," Schmitt said.

A corridor study completed in 2009 generally placed the proposed highway about half a mile east of Towanda Barnes Road. The proposed highway would run east of Bloomington-Normal and connect Interstate 55 near Towanda with Interstate 74 near Downs.

"If people like the highway or don't like the highway, they

need to be as specific on their reasons as possible when they provide their comments," said Jerry Payonk with Clark Dietz.

Comments included

The public comments will be included with the purpose and need report when it is filed with the Federal Highway Administration in February.

If the proposed highway is built, the project would cost more than \$200 million and require federal funds to complete.

Highway forum

What: Review of the purpose and needs of a proposed highway on Bloomington-Normal's east side

When: 6 to 8 p.m. today

Where: Normal Community High School, 3900 E. Raab Road, Normal

GO!

Public voices highway concerns

Cutting up farmland, noise from traffic top criticisms of planned eastside route

By M.K. Guetersloh
mkguetersloh@pantagraph.com

NORMAL — Jeanne Bozarth doesn't want to see four lanes of traffic cutting through her family's farmland, while Bruce Naffziger dreads the noise a proposed eastside highway will bring to his neighborhood.

Bozarth and Naffziger, both of Bloomington, were among the 60 area residents who attended a public meeting Thursday on the proposed highway that would connect Interstate 55 near Towan-

da with Interstate 74 near Downs. The open house at Normal Community High School, 3900 E. Raab Road, was the last public meeting on the proposed eastside highway for at least a year.

The public comments collected at the meeting — and others that can be submitted until Jan. 27 — will be included in a purpose and needs report that the Champaign engineering firm Clark Dietz will file with the Federal Highway Administration next month. Clark Dietz will collect public comment through the website set up for this

project, www.eastsidehighway.com.

"We have good roads already and we need to make those better," Bozarth said. "I just don't believe the growth is going to happen like they think it will, and this road will take good farm ground out of production."

Naffziger said he moved to The Grove on Kickapoo Creek, an eastside subdivision, two years ago because it is a quiet neighborhood. The proposed highway would be less than half a mile from The Grove.

"I think the projections for growth are too optimistic," Naffziger said. "And where they are planning on putting it — a half-

mile from Towanda Barnes Road — is too close to a major road."

Naffziger's neighbor Rod Merkle agreed.

"Towanda Barnes serves the area just fine," Merkle said. "We don't need more roads. We need to take care of the roads we have."

Mboka Mwilambwe of Bloomington said he still is studying the proposed highway and has not made a decision about it.

"I wanted to learn more about this project because with something of this magnitude it is not only going to affect me in my neighborhood but the whole community," said Mwilambwe, who lives in the Eagle Creek subdivision.

Jerry Payonk from Clark Dietz said the study will look at the general area east of Towanda Barnes Road as suggested in the corridor study completed last year, as well as other possible routes east of Bloomington-Normal.

Clark Dietz is completing the four-year environmental study on the proposed eastside highway. Payonk said the \$13 million study will determine an exact alignment for the highway.

Federal funds are paying for the environmental study.

Engineers have estimated that if the highway is approved it could be 20 years before it is completed and cost at least \$200 million.

East-side highway corridor sites under review

JUNE 06, 2011 10:23 PM • BY MARY ANN FORD | MFORD@PANTAGRAPH.COM

NORMAL — Residents likely will know what proposed east-side highway corridors will be studied further by late this summer.

Jerry Payonk of Clark Dietz, a Champaign engineering firm, brought the Normal City Council up to date Monday night one year into a four-year environmental assessment required by the Federal Highway Administration.

The assessment looks at the potential impact a proposed highway site would have on such things as water quality, natural areas, threatened and endangered species, wetlands, air quality and prime farmland.

Payonk said the list of potential sites would be narrowed to a preferred choice by next spring. That would undergo further analysis to reach a “finding of no significant impact” report for the FHA by spring 2014.

Once the best location is determined, local officials can begin purchasing the land for the project, he said.

The proposed highway would run east of the Twin Cities and likely connect Interstate 55 near Towanda to Interstate 74 near Downs.

Councilman Jeff Fritzen said he “never sensed much consensus that there is a need” for the highway.

Payonk said the idea is to accommodate expected growth by 2035, and it would be cheaper to buy the land now than to wait until the growth happens.

East-side highway routes concern residents

AUGUST 18, 2011 9:03 PM • BY MARY ANN FORD | MFORD@PANTAGRAPH.COM

NORMAL — One of the 33 remaining options for a proposed east-side highway goes right over Carol Gose's house in the Lamplighter subdivision near Towanda.

While Jerry Payonk of Clark Dietz, the engineering firm heading a study on the proposed roadway, assured the 75 of so people who attended an open house Thursday night that a highway would not split the Lamplighter subdivision, Gose was still concerned.

"I would still have a highway out my front door," she said.

Gose said she wouldn't use the road to get to her job at Country Financial. She prefers to use Towanda Barnes. The proposed highway that would connect to Interstate 55 to the north and Interstate 74 to the south, would "Just be for people who wanted to go around the town," she said.

Fellow Lamplighter subdivision resident Skip Nelson shared Gose's concerns.

"I'm here to find out more information, particularly a timetable," said Nelson, who has lived in the subdivision about 23 years.

Payonk said the plan is to have a final highway alignment by 2014. In the meantime, a community working group will help continue to narrow down the alternatives. The list already has been narrowed from 116 to 33 after looking at the effects possible locations might have on such things as agriculture, residences, business, environment and flood plains within 500 feet.

There are three possible main locations — just east of Towanda Barnes Road, by County Road 2000 East and near county Road 2100 East — and a number of combinations to connect to the interstates.

Scott Douglas said two of the options fall close to his residence in The Grove subdivision.

"Right now it's a beautiful farm," he said.

Douglas wonders if now is the time to spend money on a road project and if it's really advantageous to cut off The Grove to the rest of the city. He's also concerned about the impact of noise and truck fumes on the subdivision.

Payonk said next step is to narrow the alternatives to a "handful." Another public meeting will take place in December or January.

East side highway down to four proposed options



JANUARY 07, 2012 7:00 AM • BY MARY ANN FORD | MFORD@PANTAGRAPH.COM

BLOOMINGTON -- What started out as 129 possible alternatives for a proposed east side highway have been narrowed to four, and residents will again have a chance to offer their input at a public informational meeting.

The session will be from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Normal Community High School.

At the last public meeting in August, three possible main locations -- just east of Towanda Barnes Road, by County Road 2000 East and near County Road 2100 East -- and a number of combinations to connect the proposed highway to Interstate 55 to the north and Interstate 74 to the south were presented.

The main locations are about 8 miles long. The entire proposed highway is about 12 miles long. Estimates have put the cost of building the highway at \$200 to \$300 million. The need for the highway is based on a 2035 land-use plan and the anticipated growth on the Twin Cities' east side with an eye toward relieving traffic congestion, especially along Veterans Parkway.

Jerry Payonk of Clark Dietz, the engineering firm heading the study, said the option near County Road 2100 East has been eliminated since the August meeting.

Several residents of the nearby Lamplighter subdivision had expressed concerns over that option because it was so close to the subdivision. One of the proposed I-55 connection alternatives actually went over resident Carol Gose's house. That alternative also was just east of Benjamin Elementary School on the south end.

"It's almost impossible to develop an alternative that would completely not affect anyone ... but farmland and residential areas are primary screening criteria," Payonk said this week.

Of the remaining two proposed main locations, the one near County Road 2000 East is just west of The Grove subdivision.

The other alternative is about a half mile east of Towanda Barnes and would run close to Eagle View and Eagle View South subdivisions on the north and Towanda Barnes business park near the middle.

Both of these alternatives would connect to Towanda Barnes on the south between Cheney's Grove Road and U.S. 150 and continue southwest between the Downs interchange and the Main Street interchange to eventually connect to Interstate 74.

At the north end of the two main routes, there are two alternatives to connect the proposed

highway to Interstate 55: one by way of Northown Road; the other by way of Ziebarth Road.

"One of the hardest things is that we're talking about something that doesn't happen next year -- it's five, 10, 15 or 20 years away, or it may never be built," said Mike Matejka, one of several residents who are part of the Community Working Group part of the study.

The group has met seven times over about three years to consider all the options. Its input and public comments are among the information sources used to narrow down the alternatives.

Even though such a highway wouldn't be built for several more years, Matejka said the process of choosing an option gives everyone a head's up so decisions can be made on what to -- or not to build -- around a possible east side highway location.

Under the study timeline, the next step is to narrow the alternatives to a single "preferred alternative" and then seek a "finding of no significant impact" from a host of departments, including the Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Natural Resources in spring 2014.

Highway meeting

What: East Side Highway public informational meeting

When: 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday (identical presentations at 6:10 and 7:10 p.m.)

Where: Normal Community High School, 3900 E. Raab Road, Normal

Meeting on highway options draws 400

JANUARY 11, 2012 9:58 PM • BY MARY ANN FORD | MFORD@PANTAGRAPH.COM

NORMAL — More than 400 people attended an informational meeting on the proposed east-side highway Wednesday night, and many expressed concerns with the remaining four possible locations.

“We moved to The Grove because it was quiet, family-oriented and safe,” said Erica Roehm. “With this, I’ll look out my window and see a fence by a freeway. Our subdivision will be isolated from town.

“I am for the no-build option,” she said of the proposed road that would connect to Interstate 55 at its north end and I-74 at its south end on the Twin Cities’ east side.

The highway could run just to the west of The Grove, and there also could be an interchange right by the southeast Bloomington subdivision.

Peggy Miles, Dale Strain and Craig Fisher had similar concerns for their Eagle View neighborhood, which lies just west of the proposed east-side highway locations about a half-mile east of Towanda Barnes Road.

“The highway would be 820 feet from the edge of our neighborhood,” said Miles.

She also fears it would hinder the chances of the neighborhood getting a 14.5-acre park at the southeast corner of the subdivision.

Bloomington has received a \$400,000 grant to help develop the park, but the city would need to come up with the rest of the money (about \$600,000), according to Bloomington Alderman Jim Fruin, who also attended the meeting.

“The park was a big selling point for us,” said Miles.

Fisher said the only park option for kids in the subdivision is Bittner Park, which is across the busy Towanda Barnes Road.

The park issue aside, Miles is concerned about potential health consequences from having a freeway and all of its traffic so close to the neighborhood.

Jerry Payonk of Clark Dietz, the engineering firm leading the study on a proposed east-side highway, told the crowd during a presentation at the meeting that a freeway would be the best alternative to address traffic.

A freeway would be like an interstate and only have on and off access through ramps.

Fisher said the proposed highway isn’t only an east-side concern. If built, it would give Interstate 55 traffic a way to totally bypass the Twin Cities and get to Interstate 74. That, Fisher said,

would have a tremendous impact on west-side businesses that depend on truck traffic and other travelers.

As proposed the east-side highway is being eyed to alleviate future traffic congestion on other north-south roads such as Veterans Parkway when Twin City growth spreads even farther to the east.

Two alternatives remain to connect to I-55: by way of Zeibarth Road or by way of Northtown Road. The south connection to I-74 has been narrowed to one, starting between Cheney's Grove Road and U.S. 150 and continuing southwest between the Downs interchange and the Main Street interchange to eventually connect to I-74.

While the narrowed-down choices have eliminated a proposed route that went through parts of Lamplighter subdivision, resident Brian Bogner still has questions and wonders if the proposed highway really will solve traffic problems.

"I don't see the value of using it to get to State Farm (where he is employed)," he said. "It would take me almost two miles out of my way."

The fact that it would be built to freeway standards makes it even less attractive, he said, because there would be limited access points.

"To flow traffic into town, the freeway option limits who would use it," he said.

Proposed highway, park grant among citizen's forum topics

FEBRUARY 16, 2012 10:08 PM • [BY RACHEL WELLS | RWELLS@PANTAGRAPH.COM](#)

BLOOMINGTON — Street resurfacing, a proposed east-side highway and a soon-to-expire park grant likely will be hot topics Monday as the city hosts a Citizens Voice forum for residents' concerns.

The open forum will be 6 to 7:30 p.m. Monday at the Bloomington Center for the Performing Arts. City Manager David Hales, department representatives and elected officials will be present, and residents will be allowed three to five minutes of speaking time each.

Hales said the city has seen a spike in emails and calls about the proposed east-side highway and the proposed Eagle View Park, which is a good indicator those topics will arise at Monday's forum.

The City Council would like to hear other concerns, or praises, too, but the winter so far has been quiet, said Ward 1 Alderman Bernie Anderson, who with Ward 5 Alderman Jennifer McDade helped structure the Citizens Voice meetings.

"I probably have not had a (constituent) phone call in over 30 days," he said. Usually winters are full of complaints about snowplowing and street salting, but the mild winter means residents' minds are elsewhere, Anderson said.

But budget decisions are just around the corner, making Monday's meeting a good time to influence aldermen on their priorities, McDade said.

East-side highway hot topic at meeting

FEBRUARY 20, 2012 9:21 PM • BY RACHEL WELLS | RWELLS@PANTAGRAPH.COM

BLOOMINGTON — East-side development issues were center stage Monday as residents took advantage of Bloomington's last Citizens Voice meeting before aldermen receive a recommended budget proposal.

First instituted in 2010, the city's Citizens Voice meetings allow residents to speak on any topics they'd like while elected officials, the city manager and department heads stand by to answer questions or offer clarification.

About 70 people attended Monday's session, which was dominated by opponents of a proposed east-side highway and proponents of a new east side park, Eagle View Park.

"People commute regularly without a problem," said Jeanne Merkle, a resident of the Grove subdivision who moved to the area in 2008 without any knowledge of the highway proposal that has been under study for years. "It would destroy our view and peace and quiet."

Others called for the city to capitalize this year on a \$400,000 grant awarded by the state for a new park that would expire at the end of 2012. The park would cost the city an additional \$600,000.

City Manager David Hales gave no indication as to whether he would include the park in his recommended fiscal year 2013 budget, which he will propose to aldermen during their March 12 meeting.

Already the park would face at least some opposition — Ward 1 Alderman Bernie Anderson, who represents older parts of the city, said after the meeting the expenditure is "a sensitive issue" and that he doesn't believe the city has enough money to pay for the park.

Aldermen also heard comments about deteriorating streets, unfunded pension liabilities and the cost of recent residential developments.

Speaking after the event, resident Tim Fenton said Monday's meeting was the first Citizens Voice event he'd attended.

"It was really informative," he said, noting that he hadn't heard about the east-side highway. "I'll definitely be back."

Sorensen: Businesses should back east-side highway

OCTOBER 04, 2012 6:23 PM • [BY LENORE SOBOTA](#) | LSOBOTA@PANTAGRAPH.COM

BLOOMINGTON — McLean County Board Chairman Matt Sorensen called for more vocal support from businesses for construction of an east-side highway.

“The project needs the support of the local business community,” Sorensen told those attending the McLean County Chamber of Commerce’s State of McLean County meeting Thursday morning.

Charlie Moore, president and chief executive officer of the chamber, said after the meeting that the chamber’s board has had discussions on the highway project, but has not taken a stand on it.

“We endorsed the further study” of the project, Moore said, including the needs assessment. He expects the matter to return to the board as it progresses.

Sorensen told the gathering that, while there is room for debate on where the highway should go and how many lanes it should have, “in my opinion, there is no room for debate on the need. The need is there.”

He said, “We’re not looking at a solution to a problem in 2012. We’re looking at a project to solve a problem in 2040 and beyond.”

Also speaking at the event were Bloomington Mayor Steve Stockton and Normal Mayor Chris Koos, who gave generally upbeat assessments of their cities emerging from the recession.

Sorensen was a bit more pessimistic, noting that county government does not have the same resources — such as sales tax revenue — that Bloomington and Normal have as home-rule cities. Instead, county government relies primarily on real estate taxes and, “for the first time since 1985, overall assessed valuation is going down in the county,” he said.

Stockton pointed positively to progress being made with road resurfacing and other infrastructure improvement in Bloomington.

Looking forward, Stockton said it’s important to add wells to diversify and expand the city’s water system, which the mayor described as “essentially a regional system” that already supplies water to Hudson, Towanda, parts of Bloomington Township and larger users in Normal, such as Mitsubishi Motors North America and AdvocateBroMenn Regional Medical Center.

Koos cited a “healthy increase” in construction activity among signs that Normal is recovering from the recession.

He said improvements in uptown Normal have “been more than we hoped for” and called the projects “another example of the community working on a common cause for the common good.”

Koos said the Marriott Hotel and Conference Center is doing better than expected and the Uptown Crossing building, anchored by CVS, just filled its last vacancy.

Editorial: Time for your opinions on east-side highway

JUNE 19, 2013 7:00 AM • [BY THE PANTAGRAPH EDITORIAL BOARD](#)

It could be years before dirt is moved, but tonight's the night if you want to sound off on the controversial east-side highway project.

Engineers will present two alternative routes during a public meeting from 6 to 8 p.m. at Normal Community High School. Identical presentations will be at 6:10 p.m. and 7:10 p.m.

Both alternatives will detail the effects on residential areas, farmland, businesses and existing roads.

The proposed locations are a half-mile east of Towanda-Barnes Road and the other a mile east of Towanda-Barnes, following County Road 2000 East.

"One option impacts more businesses; one impacts more homes," said Jerry Payonk, an engineer with the Champaign firm of Clark Dietz.

The highway, to be built to freeway standards, would in essence provide a fast-moving way to connect Interstate 55 to Interstate 74 as the Twin Cities continue to grow to the east. Ziebarth Road is the likely northern connection to I-55, since Northtown Road already has been eliminated as an option, with the connection to I-74 located halfway between Downs and U.S. 51.

The 12-mile proposed project comes with a price tag of between \$200 million and \$300 million, and it has not been funded.

That alone will extend the process and funding discussions likely won't move forward until the federal agencies — Federal Highway Administration, the Environmental Protection Agency, etc. — sign off on the project.

In western Illinois, discussion about the Corridor 67 project started in the 1970s and the job still isn't done.

But ask about the 220-mile project from Rock Island to Alton and you'll hear not only about the funding problems, but also about the care taken in designing the road to avoid problems.

Building roads is an expensive and time-consuming proposition, but public feedback and participation are crucial.

Take advantage of tonight's meeting to make sure your concerns are addressed.

East-side highway still has doubters



JUNE 19, 2013 9:45 PM • [BY RACHEL WELLS | RWELLS@PANTAGRAPH.COM](#)

BLOOMINGTON — Two options remain for the path of a proposed east-side highway, and each would have a different impact on farms, businesses and residences, but many people at an informational meeting Wednesday remained opposed to the overall idea.

Jerry Payonk of the engineering firm Clark Dietz outlined the two alternatives and an environmental assessment of them during the meeting attended by more than 150 people at Normal Community High School.

The two options both would connect at the north to Interstate 55 at Ziebarth Road and at the southern end to Interstate 74 at a spot halfway between Downs and U.S. 51. One route is half a mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and the other is a mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and follows McLean County Road 2000 East.

“I understand growth; it’s just hard when you’re the casualty of growth,” said Mark Savage, who said he’s lived for about 15 years near Fort Jesse Road. He and his wife, Jill, said they believe they would lose their home with either option.

If they are correct, their home would be one of 18 residences that would be displaced by the more western route or one of 13 residences that would be displaced by the more eastern route.

The more western route also would displace seven businesses, but the more eastern route would not affect any.

The summary of the environmental assessment will be available Thursday at eastsidehighway.com.

The first route would eliminate 777 acres of “prime and important” farmland, and the second would eliminate about 794 acres of such land.

It’s the farmland that Rob Sutter took issue with. His family has farmed nearby the proposed highway since about 1934.

“It (the land) means a heck of a lot more to people than any monetary value,” he said.

Payonk said the proposed project has no funding beyond the environmental assessment, but

planning for an east-side highway now is essential.

Residents can submit comments on the two alternatives through July 3 by emailing ESHEA@clarkdietz.com. Comments will help determine the “preferred option” and will be included in information sent to the Federal Highway Administration, which must approve the project.

Mixed reactions to 2 Eastside Highway proposals

8:39PM Wednesday

June 19, 2013



Reaction to the final two proposed locations of the Eastside Highway was mixed Wednesday night at a public input meeting at Normal Community High School. (Stephanie Pawlowski/WJBC)

By Stephanie Pawlowski

NORMAL - About 200 people attended a pair of open meetings Wednesday night on the proposed route of the Eastside Highway in McLean County.

The organizers are down to two options, a highway that goes a half mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and another that's a full mile east of Towanda Barnes. The route would start at Interstate 74 on the south end and go to Interstate 55 on the north end. The highway will go over some of the roads it intersects, such as the interstates, and under others.

A feasibility study was ordered for the highway in 2002 to connect Interstates 55 and 74 on the east side of Bloomington-Normal. Reactions were mixed to the final two proposals. Chip Ester said he's concerned with who is proposing the Eastside Highway and why.

"There's no disclosure of who stands to gain the most. They have all these slides about who will be affected, but what they're not showing you is all the people who stand to gain from this," Ester said. "Because, a \$300 million project that the community doesn't necessarily want doesn't have inertia unless there are people pushing for it, and who are those people?"

Bill Jenson said he thinks the project is necessary given the projected growth of Bloomington-Normal in 30 years.

"Anything that we can do to relieve some of that inner-belt congestion I think is a good thing. It's good that they're doing their homework and doing a very thorough study on it," Jensen said.

Susan Luke, who lives in Downs, said she was concerned about the final proposals because earlier plans put the route through Downs.

"I wish they would have built Towanda Barnes Road to be able to accommodate this type of traffic instead of having to essentially build another Towanda Barnes and consume farm land and people's private property," Luke said.

Meta Mickens-Baker, a Unit 5 school board member, said she thought the highway would end up further east, because the current sites are next to residential areas.

"I'm curious as to how much time it's going to take to build up the underpasses and the construction period. That looks like it could be pretty extensive," Mickens-Baker said.

The public can still read about the final two proposals at eastsidehighway.com and submit comments. Jerry Payonk of engineering firm Clark Dietz said the public comments will be taken until July 3.

"After that, we compile all the information. I'm sure we'll get many questions or comments and we'll compress all of those, you'll be able to download that from the website after it has been summarized," Payonk said. "Then we present it to the Federal Highway Administration and say, 'This is what we think the preferred alternative should be.' That's done in September."

Payonk said if the Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Department of Agriculture all sign off on a route, the engineering will be completed for the project.

Payonk said there's no funding for the project, and even if there were it would take several months to work on design plans. Plus, he said the county has to get rights of way and do construction preparation. Payonk said actual construction on the highway could be as much as 15 years away.

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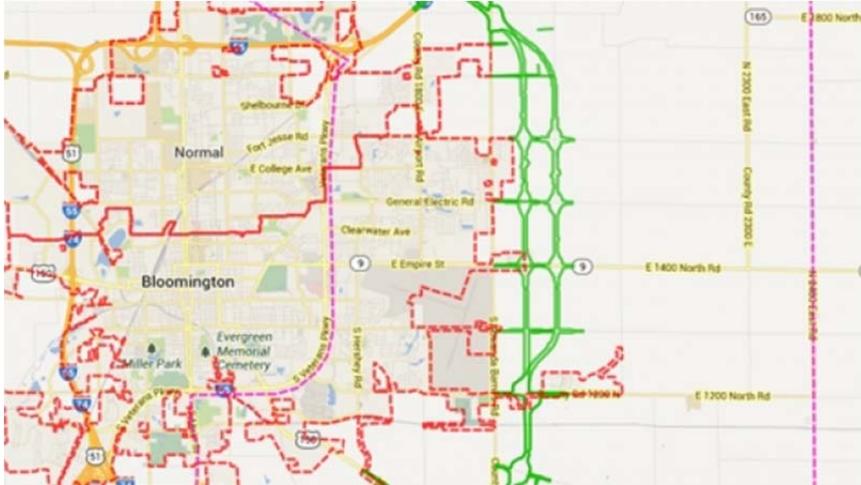
Tags:

- [Eastside Highway](#)

Eastside highway engineers will respond to public comments

7:15AM Sunday

July 7, 2013



The final two proposed routes of the eastside highway (in green) are placed a half mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and a full mile east of Towanda Barnes Road. (Photo from eastsidehighway.com)

By Stephanie Pawlowski

BLOOMINGTON - The public comment period on the final two options for an east side highway has closed, and soon the public will get some responses.

Jerry Payonk of engineering firm Clark Dietz said a lot of comments were made, some supportive of the project, some against the project and some people offering their choice between a proposed route that goes a half mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and the other that goes a full mile east.

He said those comments will be compiled and engineers will respond to each one.

"And that might take a little time because we received numerous ones and we want to be detailed in our responses," Payonk said. "Some responses are very similar, so we'll put them into groups perhaps. So, it might be a couple of weeks before we get responses back to the public."

Payonk said not everyone offered a return addresses on the comments. He said the next step is presenting a preferred alternative to the Federal Highway Administration in September.

"They are going to want to know how the public weighed in, so we will have where they weighted in, which alternative they preferred and which alternative they didn't prefer," Payonk said.

The next step after that won't come until 2014.

An eastside highway was first eyed by the Regional Planning Commission in the early 1990's as developments were growing on the east side. Payonk said McLean County is one of the fastest growing counties in Illinois outside of Chicago and the collar counties.

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Meeting Tuesday to discuss east side highway project

AUGUST 12, 2013 5:50 PM • BY PANTAGRAPH STAFF

BLOOMINGTON — Some east side Bloomington residents have organized a meeting to discuss the proposed east-side highway project with elected officials.

The meeting is open to the public and will take place at 6 p.m. tonight at Holiday Inn and Suites, 3202 E. Empire St., across from the Central Illinois Regional Airport.

District 10 McLean County Board members Ben Owens and Chuck Erickson and County Board Chairman Matt Sorensen have been invited, as well as Bloomington City Council aldermen Jim Fruin, Rob Fazzini and Mboka Mwilambwe and Mayor Tari Renner.

The meeting will include a panel discussion.

The location of the proposed east-side highway has been narrowed to two alternatives: one a half-mile east of Towanda Barnes Road and the other a mile east of Towanda Barnes Road following County Road 2000 East. The road would connect to Interstate 55 on the north by Ziebarth Road and to Interstate 74 on the south at a location halfway between Downs and U.S. 51.

Clark Dietz, the Champaign engineering firm, collected public comments in June. The comments will be used to determine a “preferred option” and will be included with information sent to the Federal Highway Administration in September. The FHA and other federal agencies including the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Natural Resources will review the materials and decide if they concur with the “preferred option.”

FHA approval is needed for the project, designed to alleviate future traffic congestion on north-south roads such as Veterans Parkway. Construction costs have been estimated between \$200 million and \$300 million. There currently is no funding for the project.

East-side highway foes voice objections

AUGUST 13, 2013 10:07 PM • BY KEVIN BARLOW | KBARLOW@PANTAGRAPH.COM |

BLOOMINGTON — As a lifelong resident of McLean County and a semi-retired farmer living on a centennial farm in the family since 1888, Frank Wieting has seen growth on Bloomington's east side over the years.

He was one of about 75 residents who attended a public hearing at the Bloomington Holiday Inn and Suites Tuesday night for a panel discussion on a proposed east-side highway project. Like most in attendance, Wieting opposed the project.

"In the last hundreds of years, when has one new acre of land been produced?" he said. "We can build houses and we can build factories and we can build highways, but we cannot build more land. I think it's a crime against nature to consider tearing up land for this highway."

The proposed highway would connect to Interstate 55 on the north by Ziebarth Road and to Interstate 74 on the south between Downs and U.S. 51. Two alternatives are being considered and several governing bodies, including the Bloomington, Normal and McLean County will have an advisory vote on the final plan.

"Bloomington-Normal is physically the size of San Francisco," said Bloomington Mayor Tari Renner. "San Francisco has 700,000 people and we have 100,000 people, but in the same size of an area they have. I don't necessarily think we will get federal money, and I think that is also the case for Springfield. I am not convinced that it is necessary and I am concerned about the long-term consequences for our city and I cannot support this at this time."

Sorensen backs highway

County Board Chairman Matt Sorensen said he feels the area needs to move forward with planning for its transportation needs and supports the proposed project.

"I can't imagine Bloomington-Normal without Veterans Parkway and I look at this project that way," he said. "I do not know whether or not this is exactly the right corridor, but the engineers who have studied this believe it is, so I have to take that on faith."

East-side resident Jim Landrus said any decision to move forward with the project would decrease the value of homes in several subdivisions that would be affected by the project.

Construction costs have been estimated at around \$350 million, and before any votes are taken, the McLean County Board, Bloomington City Council and Normal City Council would meet in a joint session to discuss the proposed plan, Sorensen said.

Panelists discuss Eastside Highway with public

9:18PM Tuesday

August 13, 2013



Panelists heard public concerns about a possible Eastside Highway. (Adam Studzinski/WJBC)

By Adam Studzinski

BLOOMINGTON - McLean County officials, along with various city representatives, held a panel discussion on Tuesday to hear from the public, and answer questions about the controversial Eastside Highway proposal.

There is nothing remotely set in stone yet, and according to Public Works Director Jim Karch the project will not even happen if growth on the eastside does not continue the way it has been.

"If we all the sudden became a community that started shrinking, the Eastside Highway would not be done," said Karch.

Bloomington resident Jeff Prella said he does not believe the growth will happen, mainly because the major business in Bloomington aren't growing.

"What you're looking at is the maximum amount of people you can employ really determines the maximum amount your population can grow," Prella said. "That depends on where each business is at in their life cycle. State Farm is in a very mature state, Country Financial is in a mature state, Bridgestone is in a mature state, Mitsubishi is in a mature state. There's not a single one in growth."

A major concern from the public has been the effect the possible highway would have on residences in the area. However, resident Frank Wieting said farmland would be effected as well.

"We can build houses, we can build factories, we can build highways, but we can't produce mother natures land," Wieting said. "I think it's a crime against creation to even consider tearing this up for a highway."

McLean County Board Chairman Matt Sorenson believes what they need to do is get the right-of-way for where the highway would go. That way, if they do go through with it, future residents will know about the potential for the roadway.

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