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Nicollet wants interchange

MnDOT suggests RCUT for Hwy 14 and State Hwy 11 intersection

December 17, 2013

By Fritz Busch - Staff Writer , The Journal

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NICOLLET - Nicollet Mayor Fred Froehlich left no doubt where he stood when he spoke Monday at the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) meeting about future plans for the U.S. Highway 14 and State Highway 111 intersection in the Nicollet Public School Community Room.

"The (Nicollet) City Council has always advocated for a full interchange. It's our only alternative," Froehlich said. "An RCUT (Reduced Conflict Intersection) is unacceptable for this community. If it's built here, it would be the only one on Highway 14 in the state. Other places with half the traffic we have or less already have interchanges. I hope MnDOT sits down with us again before it's etched in stone."

Rep. Clark Johnson, D-North Mankato, spoke before Highway 14 expansion project engineers took public comments at tables covered with enlarged preliminary intersection control design drawings.

Article Photos



Staff photo by Fritz Busch

"I want to thank MnDOT for deciding to move up the Highway 14 four-lane expansion from North Mankato to west Nicollet to 2015-16," Johnson said. "It's critical we do it well, do it right. Fred's (Froehlich) legislative testimony last session was some of the most powerful I've heard. This has to be understood. Safety is a priority, plus economic development in all four directions. An RCUT creates a barrier to north and south development. I hope MnDOT takes that into consideration."

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Project engineers talked about five Nicollet intersection alternatives - two-way stop signs, a roundabout, RCUT that prevents left turns onto Highway 14 in favor of right turns and U-turns farther down the road, traffic signals, and interchanges with local access and limited local access.

Anticipated crash reduction was 30-50 percent with a traffic signal, 40-60 percent with a roundabout and RCUT, and 70-90 percent with interchanges.

Project engineers said they did not favor a \$.6 to \$.9 million roundabout because it would slow Highway 14 traffic too much, although it had the best cost/benefit ratio of 4.3. They favored a \$.7 to \$1 million RCUT that had a 3.6 cost/benefit ratio. Traffic signals had a 2.2 cost/benefit ratio and local access and limited local access interchanges, estimated to cost from \$7.2 to \$11.3 million, had 0.7 and 0.8 cost/benefit ratios.

Construction of Highway 14 four-lane highway expansion from North Mankato to Nicollet and a 2.5-mile bypass south of Nicollet were recently advanced from 2017-18 construction to 2015-16 with up to \$25 million in Corridors of Commerce funding.

A 2012 Road Safety Audit confirmed head-on crashes were of particular concern on Highway 14. A 2003 MnDOT Scoping Decision Document of Highway 14 from North Mankato to New Ulm stated that road improvements were needed to address safety, traffic congestion and highway access.

Study results showed Courtland prefers a northern bypass and Nicollet a southern bypass.

A New Ulm bypass was not studied, but MnDOT plans to replace two Highway 14 bridges in New Ulm in 2018-19. Funding for a new Highway 14-15 (Y) intersection design and construction dates remain to be determined.

Meeting immediately after the MnDOT meeting, the Nicollet City Council unanimously approved a resolution to not support MnDOT's plan to build a RCUT at the RH 14/TH 111/CSAH 23 intersection.

The resolution stated that an at-grade, RCUT intersection does not safely accommodate slow-moving, oversized vehicles channeling into additional lanes of oncoming traffic at higher speeds, and it does not meet the traffic patterns at the intersection frequently used by school buses and funeral processions.

The resolution further resolved that the City of Nicollet called upon Gov. Mark Dayton and MnDOT Commissioner Charles Zelle to direct MnDOT to use the adequate Corridors of Commerce program funds provided to the Nicollet bypass project.

Prior to the resolution vote, Froehlich said MnDOT needs municipal approval to do the project in Nicollet. "It's not over until the project is complete," Froehlich said. "I called a Cenex C-store manager located at the RCUT on U.S. Highway 212 in Cologne. He told me it's confusing to older drivers, and there have been many near-miss accidents there. One of the next things we'll do is draft a letter to Gov. Dayton."

For more information, visit www.dot.state.mn.us/d7/projects/14newulmtomankato/

(Fritz Busch can be e-mailed at fbusch@nujournal.com).

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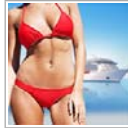
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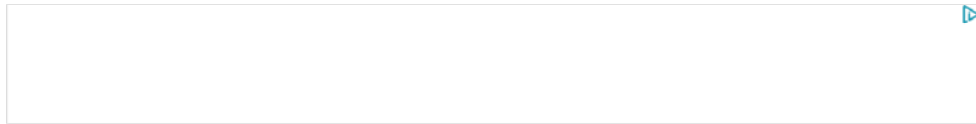


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