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Opposition to Nicollet intersection plan growing

Petition against MnDOT's plan circulating

By Josh Moniz

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---- — NICOLLET — Public outcry is growing among Nicollet residents who oppose the Minnesota Department of Transportation's intersection plan for the new Nicollet bypass, resulting in several public displays of opposition.

The newly formed website Nicollet Interchange criticizes MnDOT's plan for a Reduced Conflict Intersection, called RCUT, to offset the hazards that will be created by the new intersection of Highway 111 and Highway 14. The intersection is part of Highway 14's four-lane expansion from North Mankato, which will change the highway's route to bypass Nicollet.

A website hosts a formal petition against MnDOT's plan. It has garnered more than 590 signatures since it was created Dec. 18. The petition will be sent to Gov. Mark Dayton and southern Minnesota lawmakers by Jan. 10, or when it reaches 1,000 signatures. The website can be viewed at www.nicolletinterchange.com/

A separate physical petition sheet posted at the Nicollet Mart gas station garnered more than 100 signatures.

The website argues MnDOT should build an interchange layout at the intersection. The majority of Nicollet residents at MnDOT's Dec. 15 hearing on the intersection favored an interchange. Later that night, the Nicollet City Council passed a formal resolution opposing a RCUT layout and calling for an interchange layout.

Troy Hewitt, plant manager at Hewitt Machine & Manufacturing Inc. in Nicollet, said he created the website because he is concerned the RCUT layout will hurt the city's economic development. He also said he is concerned the design will be unsafe for larger vehicles.

“We believe it's necessary to save the town. I don't think they're accounting for the amount of trucking that will be using the intersection,” Hewitt said.

He is also working with several Nicollet residents to distribute lawn signs opposing MnDOT's plan. He said they have handed out more than 100 signs, which are free to the public.

MnDOT's proposed RCUT layout uses a divider to prevent Highway 111 traffic from crossing Highway 14. Instead, the traffic is routed to the right along Highway 14 to a special U-turn lane. Drivers are then

directed along the opposing Highway 14 lane back to Highway 111. The design allows drivers to only focus on one direction of traffic.

The interchange layout separates Highway 111 traffic by diverting it over Highway 14 with a bridge, which is accessed via ramps.

MnDOT's analysis shows both plans will significantly reduce crashes at the intersection. The interchange layout reduces a higher percentage of crashes while the RCUT layout is only one-eighth the cost of an interchange.

MnDOT official previously said the department's preferred plan is not set in stone. MnDOT officials said they plan to hold extensive discussions with Nicollet residents to determine a compromise plan, which will be discussed during a public hearing in February.