

Public weighs in on intersection

Concerns include impact on Fuller Road traffic

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The busy intersection of Washington Avenue Extension and Fuller Road impacts tens of thousands of drivers every day, but it was clear Thursday, July 22, that those who live nearby are the most passionate about its shortcomings.

A sizable crowd turned out for a public meeting on a proposal to reconstruct that congested confluence. At the moment, there are three designs on the table (four if you count the option of doing nothing to the intersection).

The first would be to build a new signalized intersection, the second would include a two-lane roundabout and the third would also involve the construction of a roundabout, but include a bridge over the circle for Washington Avenue Extension through traffic.

That would be the most costly option, at about \$22 million total (alternatives one and two would weigh in at about \$6 to \$6.5 million). The county would put in \$3 million, federal funds would cover \$2 million and state funding would cover the remainder (\$17 million in the last case).

The county favors the elevated roadway plan, which would also allow for traffic to continue to use the intersection during construction.

Jeff Pangburn of project engineer Creighton Manning



ABOVE: Members of the public examined different alternatives for reconstructing the Fuller Road and Washington Avenue Extension intersection before a public meeting on Thursday, July 22.

LEFT: Albany County Director of Operations Michael Franchini and Jeff Pangburn of Creighton Manning Engineering gave a presentation, then took questions.

Charles Wiff/Spotlight

said a roundabout at this location would not only ease traffic congestion, but allow pedestrians and bicycles to safely use the crossing. There are also 90 percent fewer fatalities in roundabouts than in traditional signalized intersections, he said.

"It's a great tool that we have to try to make for a safer intersection," Pangburn said. "It really simplifies the points of contact."

In June, a state trooper was injured at the intersection when

his vehicle was struck by another car. He was escorting an oversized load at the time.

The bridge over the roundabout would remove about 20,000 vehicles from the roundabout, too.

Some residents at the meeting said they were supportive of alternative three for that reason alone, and complained that accessing Fuller road from their driveways or side roads during rush hour is nigh impossible. Construction on Fuller Road hasn't helped

matters. One man said he was unable to leave his driveway when workers began pouring concrete without notice.

Albany County Director of Operations Michael Franchini

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said the intersection reconstruction should alleviate some of these problems, as traffic won't back up as much. Still, he admitted Fuller Road is much busier than it used to be.

"I'm not sure how you move people out of their driveways where there's as many cars as there are," he said.

Others wondered if the speed limit on Fuller Road could be reduced from 40 mph, especially if people are going to be using it as a pedestrian thoroughfare. Franchini said while Fuller is a county road, in the Town of Guilderland speed limits are dictated by the Town Board.

Despite the concerns raised by some neighbors, many at the meeting praised the county for having an open process and for targeting the problematic intersection for redesign.

The meeting took a brief detour to other McKownville issues when Steve Janak, the College of Nanoscience and Engineering's communications director, addressed assertions made that the college is contributing to flooding issues in the area.

He said the college has suffered the same problems since its founding and is working to mitigate them.

"The bottom line...is CNSE is not responsible for the flooding issues in McKownville," he said.

Don Reeb, president of the McKownville Neighborhood Association, stood and, in an impassioned rebuttal, rejected Janak's arguments.

"Nanotech is dumping their water in McKownville, and it doesn't belong there," he said.

He also argued the college will benefit from the reconstruction because it would free up usable land north of Washington Avenue Extension.

"We know exactly why option three is being considered, so nanotech can have that roadway," he said.

John Holder, assistant vice president of facilities and infrastructure at CNSE, said while the reconstruction supported by the county would leave the college with the most usable space, it hadn't lobbied for one proposal over another.

"It's not driven by the growth of the nano complex," he said of the project. "It's not essential for us to grow in that direction."

The intersection project is tentatively scheduled for a fall 2011 start, and to be finished by the end of 2013.