

Residents comment on Northwestern plan

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In a room filled with diagrams, maps and architect's renderings, Alice Joynt contemplated the idea of a solution to traffic she braves every day.

The West Bloomfield resident lives north of a traffic improvement project that encompasses an area bounded by 14 Mile, Maple, Haggerty and Orchard Lake roads. State, county and local officials have settled on plan to put "roundabouts" - circular intersections - in 11 locations. They'll also widen roads and install four signals, as well as diverting a portion of 14 Mile.

"It will have an impact on my day," she said. "I spent a lot of my time in this area."

While she's intrigued by the roundabout concept plan and has driven in them elsewhere, Joynt has a different perspective about traffic tie-ups in that area.

"After spending 20 years in

southern California, the traffic out here is not so bad," she said with a smile.

A native Michigander, Joynt was among more than 80 residents who attended the public hearing held at West Bloomfield's Parks and Recreation Center Thursday, from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. After viewing the exhibits, which included videotape of roundabouts in other cities, computer simulations and information about current and future accident and traffic volume statistics, residents had the opportunity to leave their comments either with a court reporter or in written form.

Jean Alspector, whose home in Farmington Hills' Rolling Oaks Subdivision backs onto 14 Mile, thinks the solutions presented are in line with what residents have said they wanted all along. Among the exhibits were the results of a survey asking residents what types of aesthetic treatments they wanted in boulevards and in the landscaped centers

of the traffic circles.

"I think it'll all fit in nice," she said. "They need to do something. There's got to be some help for those intersections."

Alspector said she now tries to avoid the affected intersections at rush hour.

"It's horrendous," she said. "Especially making left turns. I hope this is really going to work. But I wish it could be in the next few years."

Designers said construction on the roundabouts, which they say reduce congestion by keeping vehicles in motion at a slower rate, won't begin for at least another two or three years.

Currently they are in the process of applying to qualify for federal funding. Copies of an Environmental Impact Statement were available at the meeting and can be reviewed at local libraries and city halls.

The comment period closes in mid-June.

Traffic from page A1

Traffic flows freely most of the time.

Crown said roundabouts are expected to reduce accidents at the designated intersections by 75 percent. Peak delays are expected to be reduced from three minutes or more to between three and seven seconds.

"The reduction is dramatic, to put it mildly," Crown said.

However, members of the public had questions about their experiences with traffic circles and roundabouts.

Richard Barr of West Bloomfield got stuck in a roundabout while driving in England, when a car accident on an adjacent street stopped traffic completely.

"If there's a crash on Maple, won't that back everything up?" he asked.

"Roundabouts have fewer crashes, but when it does have a crash, they tend to be more disruptive than in other types of intersections," Ourston admitted.

Crown pointed out that most roads in Europe have only one lane in each direction. "Obviously when you widen the road, you have a place to go... But the benefits are much greater than the nonbenefits of a crash."

Another resident talked about a roundabout in Clearwater Beach, Florida, widely considered a disaster. Crown quickly pointed out he hadn't designed that one, but had been hired by

that city to fix it. Even so, it had reduced traffic delays, he noted.

"We're not going to build them like Clearwater," Crown assured residents.

Construction - and the ultimate solution for which residents have been waiting - is still a few years out. MDOT's five-year plan includes only a study

'Roundabouts have fewer crashes, but when it does have a crash, they tend to be more disruptive...'

Leif Ourston
—Roundabout designer

of the area; \$26 million in funding has been reserved for 2006. The total cost of the project is a staggering \$90 million, and consultants at DLZ Corp. are working with officials to locate additional sources of funding, according to project manager Stephen Metzger.

Residents seemed disappointed that the project wouldn't get under way for at least two to three years. Stephen Metzger, project manager for DLZ, said developers working on a Farmington Hills shopping center have done traffic studies and plan some improvements.

At the close of the presentation, Barr, who said he'd been following the project for three or four years, wasn't quite as skeptical as when it started.

"I'm always concerned when MDOT has a new idea how to do things, because their track record isn't perfect," he said. "This is a very bad arena to try out new ideas. But it was more persuasive than I thought it would be."

Barr was concerned that West Bloomfield Township officials weren't at the meeting to interact with residents and answer questions. Metzger said DLZ had made presentations to the township, City of Farmington Hills, homeowners groups - anyone who requested more information.

Still, Barr said, that wasn't the same.

"I think they need to be here," he said. "It's irresponsible."

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