

City may ditch coal dock roundabout plan

Written by Kristyn Halbig Ziehm
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Public complaints about proposal prompt Port officials to explore other options for South Wisconsin Street project

A plan to install a roundabout on South Wisconsin Street at the entrance to the coal dock next year is being reconsidered by Port Washington officials, who are also looking at ways to recreate the city's southern gateway next year.

"The roundabout wasn't really warmly received," Public Works Director Rob Vanden Noven told officials recently.

"An alley comes right onto it, as does a driveway and the Interurban Trail. People asked if bikes would have to go through the roundabout if riders wanted to go north on Wisconsin Street.

"I think we're going to go to plan B or C or whatever we can dream up."

If approved, the proposed roundabout would be the city's second. The other will be built at the crossing of highways 33 and LL when Highway 33 is reconstructed in 2011.

The Wisconsin Street roundabout was intended to be a gateway feature for the coal dock park development, Vanden Noven said, but there are other ways to accomplish that goal without a traffic circle.

Those include using pavers or decorative pavement or bump outs at the park entrance, he told the Board of Public Works earlier this month. Creating a pedestrian island in the crosswalk leading to the coal dock entrance or installing a decorative archway or columns at the coal dock entrance are also being considered.

"The idea behind the gateway feature is to identify this as a specific place. We want it to be something people like, not something they think is a pain to drive through," Vanden Noven added.

The comments were made during a recent public informational meeting on proposed road improvements for Division, Chestnut and Wisconsin streets and in written comments submitted after the session, Vanden Noven said.

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People at that meeting also stressed the need for the city to divert traffic from Division and Chestnut streets and onto the new South Wisconsin Street when it is built through the current We Energies property next year.

Diverting traffic is essential to changing these streets from arterials to roads that service neighborhoods, they said.

The southern extension of Wisconsin Street will largely follow the existing construction road through the utility's property. Traffic heading into the city will be funneled onto the street at Highway C and Sunset Road.

The Common Council last week authorized Vanden Noven to meet with county officials to seek changes to Highway C to accommodate the new intersection.

The proposed changes, which were reviewed by the Board of Public Works earlier this month, would include lowering the speed limit from 40 mph to perhaps 25 mph south of the interchange and creating a right turn lane to channel traffic onto the new Wisconsin Street. Traffic heading into Port on Division Street or turning onto Sunset Road would have to switch lanes to make those movements.

"People want us to make sure we do everything we can to channel traffic onto the new Wisconsin Street," Vanden Noven said. "We're projecting at least three-quarters if not 90% of traffic will use this street. Most traffic is going to want to take the Wisconsin Street route because their destination is going to be downtown."

Board members debated how much to propose lowering the speed limit, something Vanden Noven said will need to be determined with additional study.

But board Chairman Tom Veale also suggested the best way to channel traffic onto Wisconsin Street might be to construct a roundabout at the intersection.

"They're really expensive," Vanden Noven said, primarily because they require more land than a traditional crossing. "This we can do within the existing footprint."

Vanden Noven said that during initial talks, the county was not overly receptive to the proposed reconfiguration of the crossing. He has not discussed lowering the speed limit with the county, he added.

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“I think this is a reasonable plan,” board member Mike Ehrlich said. “I’m all for this concept.”