

Steuben County Commissioners & DeKalb County Commissioners

Joint Meeting re: 800 S/Old 27 Intersection

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Present: Bill Hartman, DeKalb County Commissioner, Jackie Rowan, DeKalb County Commissioner, James Crowl, Steuben County Commissioner, Lynne Liechty, Steuben County Commissioner, Erin Schiffli, Steuben County Commissioners' Assistant, Kim Meyers, Steuben County Auditor, Kelli Johnson, Steuben County Deputy Auditor, Rodney Robinson, Steuben County Sheriff, Jennifer Sharkey, Steuben County Engineer, Ben Parker, DeKalb County Highway Superintendent, Derek Iddings, Steuben County Highway Superintendent, Brian Warstler, Steuben Resident, Tim Fry, DeKalb County Resident, Dan Avery, Northeast Indiana Regional Coordinating Council (NIRCC), Bill VanWye, DeKalb County Council.

James Crowl thanked everyone for coming to discuss the issue of the dangerous intersection located at 800 S and Old 27. Commissioner Crowl said something should be done to help the safety of the people whom travel that road. With Ashley, Indiana being more productive and Hamilton being the same way, more trucks are traveling that route which makes it even more dangerous.

Jennifer Sharkey, Steuben County Highway Engineer, stated back in October, 2019, a Road Safety Audit Study was completed on that intersection. Ms. Sharkey said they spoke to some of the residents in the area, looked at the geometry of the intersection and from that, they received a report. That report suggested installing the intersection warning signs on the Old 27 approaches with supplementary plaques for the 40 MPH speed, adding the "cross traffic does not stop" plaques at both stop signs on 800 S and there are plans to redo the stop bars and pavement markings in that area as well. Ms. Sharkey said flashing beacons have also been installed on the stop and stop ahead signs to warn motorist of the upcoming intersection. In addition to those items, there are some long-term considerations that were provided such as, the installation of a rural roundabout, if feasible and fixing the skewed alignment of 800 S. She said that both counties have cleaned up brush and removed additional signage to help clear the site distance as well.

Ms. Sharkey said the skew of the intersection was the main concern because the frame of the windshield blocks the driver's view. She said a lot of the statistics showed that the vehicles did stop, but then progressed into the intersection. It wasn't that they were missing the stop sign completely, there were some that treated it as a yield instead of a stop.

Jennifer Sharkey stated there is potentially a federal aid call for safety funds in the fall of 2020. She said that would be a 90% federal grant with a 10% local match; however, additional investigation is needed to know what exactly should be done at that intersection. An estimate of costs would also have to be determined so the grant can be applied for. Ms. Sharkey said the only downfall to the grant that is the timeframe for those projects are typically 3-5 years out. If something immediate is preferred, using local funds is another option to be investigated.

Rodney Robinson, Sheriff, said the amount of traffic that passes that road at that intersection is very interesting and that is what causes the issue with the number and severity of accidents. He said there are many roads that meet Old 27, some are skewed as well, but those accidents are not seen because the traffic is minimal. With this intersection being as skewed as it is and the traffic going through there, he would encourage a roundabout if the skew is not corrected. He said if the skew is

able to be corrected, there is still the concern of number of vehicles that cross through that intersection and at the rate of speed they are doing so. Sheriff Robinson said they are both coming from different directions at 50+ MPH and that's just the traffic movement. He said, in his opinion, a roundabout would be substantial enough to lessen the issue at the intersection for both counties.

Jennifer Sharkey said there are no stop conditions along Old 27 between the center of Angola to US 6 in DeKalb County and it is free flowing, even though the speed reduces in Waterloo and Angola near the residential areas. She said it is a very heavily used, unofficial bypass in Steuben County, but is an official 1-69 bypass in DeKalb County, so that would be another consideration as well.

James Crowl said when you are coming from the east, going west, you are coming up hill a little bit and wondered if that was made a level plain if that would help. Ms. Sharkey said that would help; however, the skew would still need to be addressed at that point, but it would give more of a notice to drivers when they are coming up to that intersection.

Rodney Robinson said running of the stop sign happens now because of the elevation change and they can't see with the column in the car, compounded with depth issues, speed and angle of incident, it is a really dangerous intersection when it comes to all around safety. He said he doesn't live there, but if you made that a 4-way, he doesn't think they would want to listen to cars starting and stopping constantly all night and all day long, versus a roundabout which would keep vehicles moving or keeping the stop signs that they currently have.

Jennifer Sharkey said they look at it from the safety component, the economic vitality component and quality of life. She said they could put rumble strips down as people approach that intersection, but residents in that area would hear that every single time a car goes through, so all three (3) aspects need to be taken into consideration.

Lynne Liechty said the turning radius needs to be considered as well because trucking is going to increase in that area and some of those tight roundabouts don't work. Ms. Sharkey said rural roundabouts are designed to different standards compared to what you would see in a more urban area and that would account for that type of traffic flow.

Tim Fry asked what this would do to his property. Ben Parker, DeKalb County Highway Superintendent, says a lot of the issue he sees with the intersection is the obstruction of view coming up to it. Whatever is done moving forward, they are going to have to acquire additional right of way anyway and he wonders what would happen if they acquired additional right of way on the east side and cleared that area of the trees, brush and hill. Mr. Parker said that way there will be sight distance as you are approaching that and you can see both ways, which would be a substantial help as well.

Bill VanWye, DeKalb County Council, said clear the trees out. Ben Parker said it is out of the County right of way. Mr. VanWye said they have permission on the north side, as he is the property owner. He said there is an incline there that they could haul the dirt out and it would not affect the farm and he thought it could be dropped 2-3 feet if the trees were cleared out.

Tim Fry, DeKalb County Resident, said the southeast side was cleared several years back and it has grown back. He said he believes Jim or Kevin Days owns that piece of property.

Bill Hartman, DeKalb County Commissioner, said he likes the roundabout idea as a long-term fix. He just wonders how it will affect the houses on that corner. Tim Fry said he needs to know that too as he has material stacked up to put on his home this year and there is no reason for him to spend his time and effort if he is going to be bought or squeezed out. Commissioner Hartman said they could spend a lot of money changing the skew and doing the other projects around there, but he thinks in the long run that wouldn't fix the problem.

Tim Fry asked about slowing down the traffic. He said the signs are not slowing the traffic at all, he still has semis passing his home at 70 MPH going north and south. Mr. Fry said south of Auburn it is 45 MPH almost to the county line. In Steuben County CR 300 goes 35 MPH all the way to 120, if the traffic was slowed down, he believes it would help because there are places for officers to sit and monitor that. Mr. Fry said the neighbor has made it clear her driveway is open anytime to emergency units and to the police and the gas company is just past his home with a perfect drive to police the drivers. He said a speed limit of 40 or 45 MPH, if policed, would help. Mr. Fry said he has lived in his home since 1979 and his family has owned it since the 1950's. He said he doesn't plan on or want to move because he just put a lifetime roof on it and he bought all the materials to improve the outside. He said last night he heard a jake brake at 11:00 p.m. Mr. Fry said with the traffic, he has to listen to his television at a louder volume as well.

Tim Fry said another issue is that the truckers have found out that they can bypass tolls by getting off at 1-69 and going to 49 to get on the highway. Mr. Fry said the Hamilton corner coming from the east is the most dangerous because people fly right through there. In the last month he said there have been three (3) Family Dollar semis that have blown right through the stop sign going 50-60 MPH.

Mr. Fry said he was very pleased about the flashing signs and they worked for a little while, but with the speed traffic is going, they don't pay attention to them anymore. He thinks Phase I, it needs to be rezoning for speed because it isn't safe. Mr. Fry said it will take a lot to fill in the other side of the road because both sides taper down quite a bit. Mr. Fry doesn't believe a 4 way would work either because it sometimes takes him 5 minutes to pull out of his driveway and a 4 way would make it worse. He said he also believes a turn lane needs to be installed on the north corner because people are driving off the road causing large pot holes and driving into the neighbor's yard.

James Crowl thanked Mr. Fry for his input and said everything that he mentioned is right on as it is a very dangerous intersection. Brian Warstler said that anytime there is an accident north of the Mile Marker 340, everyone gets off at the Ashley and Waterloo exits and it takes a county officer to go to that corner and direct traffic because there is no 4 way stop and all that traffic causes congestion. He said all the traffic coming from the south causes everyone coming down 800 to be blocked. He said he agrees that the speed limit needs to be changed because drivers don't slow down for the railroad tracks or the corners.

Jennifer Sharkey said the road safety audit has been performed. Ms. Sharkey said Steuben County is not serviced by the Northeast Indiana Regional Coordinating Council (NIRCC), but DeKalb County is. She said Steuben County is in a Regional Planning Organization, so Region 3a is our regional group where as NIRCC is a MPO which is a Metropolitan Planning Organization that covers DeKalb County, Allen County and several other counties. Ms. Sharkey said she is not sure how this would transpire if there was a partnership between DeKalb County and Steuben County and if NIRCC could help with any sort of investigation. She said right now they just have recommendations of options, but

to take that step further, they need to look at a good feasibility study to make sure the options are feasible for this area so a consulting firm is not hired to design something that might not be the best route. She said there are some investigative procedures that can be utilized to figure out whether a roundabout is the appropriate approach.

Dan Avery, NIRCC, said we are on the right track and the first step has been taken. Mr. Avery said he would offer, if the Commissioners wish to have NIRCC's services (no charge due to funding through DeKalb County), NIRCC could do a full intersection count with traffic cameras. He said they may want to delay the process until the lake traffic kicks so they can get a really good look at the intersection and know what is happening. He they would then have all the turning movements, types of traffic going through the intersection, classification of the traffic and it would give them a lot of data to share. He said they can also provide a video feed to see if people are blowing the stop sign, slowing but not stopping, etc. Mr. Avery said they can evaluate whether a 4 way stop would be warranted. He said typically 4 way stops and traffic signal need to meet warrant and state law requires you do an engineering study and the study has to validate the particular type of application in which you want to apply for.

Mr. Avery said he sat at the intersection for a while this morning and when he pulled through the intersection, it wasn't the windshield that blocked the view, it was the bars between the two (2) doors and the skew does prevent an issue there. Dan Avery said they can provide enough data that they would probably collect anyway to provide to the engineering firm. He said it is much cheaper for them to collect the information and provide it than to pay the engineering firm to collect it. Mr. Avery said that is an old state route and the speed can be posted lower, but people travel at the speed in which they are comfortable traveling.

Dan Avery said he would not see any problem with engaging a firm to see if fixing the skew and putting in a roundabout would work together or work against each other. He said he would like to talk to Ben Parker and Jennifer Sharkey about what is driving the truck traffic so they have an understanding.

Bill VanWye asked if it was okay for Dan Avery to work off of DeKalb County into Steuben County since DeKalb pays for their services. Bill Hartman said he doesn't have an answer to that and Mr. Avery would know better than he would. Dan Avery said that they don't have a problem with it and they can partner with 3a to make sure they are aware. He doesn't think there is any violation with any codes as long as it is okay with both sets of Commissioners. Technically, the road is half DeKalb and half Steuben and he thinks it is reasonable that they look at the whole thing because it wouldn't make sense if they only looked at half.

James Crowl agreed the study shouldn't happen until the second week of June, but with everything going on, who knows what will happen. Once the study is done, Dan Avery said return time would probably be early July they could have the analysis done, warrants done, etc. He said the difficult part is getting the data and making sure it is valid.

Mr. Fry said his home needs painted now because in 3-5 years it won't be worth anything. Commissioner Crowl said no one can tell Mr. Fry anything about his home. Tim Fry requested to be contacted with the information and future meetings. James Crowl asked the Highway Departments to do brush work within the next couple of weeks. Ben Parker said he will have to get a right of entry from

the property owner on DeKalb's side and Steuben's side is Bill VanWye's property and he has given permission to clear the brush.

Bill Hartman said they had information that there are accidents on roundabouts but they are low level with hardly any fatalities and low injury rate. He said the traffic is constantly moving and you do not speed up to a roundabout, you slow down. Mr. Hartman said it is a speed deterrent and since speed is an issue at this intersection, a roundabout would solve it. He said he has been to several roundabouts and he doesn't think they would have to change the skew to put in a roundabout.

Tim Fry asked how much space a roundabout would require and he has major concerns. Jackie Rowan, DeKalb County Commissioner, said it is her understanding with the width of roundabouts and semis going around, that will be a big issue as well. Tim Fry said a roundabout could take him out or it would be on top of his property.

James Crowl said he understands everything Mr. Fry is saying. He said if down the road and a roundabout has to be installed and his home is needed, Mr. Fry would be paid a fair price for it. He said they are not trying to squeeze anyone out. Bill Hartman said any improvements Mr. Fry does to his home himself, he will be money ahead down the road and he will get paid back that labor because it will increase the value of his home. Tim Fry said it just doesn't give him the usage of his home that he was hoping for.

Jennifer Sharkey said Federal Highway and LTAP helpers wanted to identify locations to do workshops for the Road Safety Audit so they can get additional individuals trained to do those. She said she did offer this intersection as a location for a training location so there is a possibility that another Road Safety Audit would be conducted, potentially in April.

Ben Parker thanked the Commissioners for coming together as he knows this has been a hot topic for the last few years. He believes the constituents would be happy with this and the fact they are looking forward. Mr. Parker said he looks forward to working on this project with Steuben County.

Bill VanWye, DeKalb County Council, thanked the Commissioners for meeting on this topic as well.

Tim Fry also thanked the Commissioners for addressing the issue and he doesn't think the issue will be solved until the speed is lowered.