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W.Va. 2 Road Improvements Discussed at Meeting in Wetzel County

The W.Va. 2 Proctor to Kent expansion project is slated to get underway in 2020, according to Gus Suwaid, West Virginia Division of Highways District 6 engineer.

Suwaid briefed the West Virginia Route 2 and I-68 Authority on that project and several other road projects at the authority's meeting on Tuesday, held at Wetzel County Hospital in New Martinsville.

The green light was given for the Proctor to Kent expansion project after West Virginians voted in favor of passing the multi-million dollar road bond referendum on Oct. 7.

Suwaid said the design process is just beginning for the project. This process will begin with the environmental phase.

Suwaid cited a Nov. 2 meeting at which the public had the opportunity to review three alternatives being considered for the expansion. Suwaid said the period for public comment on the plans had just concluded.

The price tag for the expansion project ranges from \$60.1 million for Alternative One, \$77.9 million for Alternative Two and \$89.3 million for Alternative Three.

Alternative One runs along the foot of the hillside and allows the existing W.Va. 2 to remain "as a frontage or plant access road, which allows the plant

accesses to be consolidated into a single intersection.”

Meanwhile, Alternative Two was developed to “maximize the amount of land available for development.” According to the WVDOH, this configuration is similar to Alternative One, with adjustments to move the alignment onto the hillside.

Alternative Three was developed to avoid key properties, such as the Bayer Heritage Federal Credit Union, as well as a recently installed gas line serving the Natrium Extraction and Fractionation Processing Plant. This includes a higher alignment on the hillside, to the east of Alternatives One and Two.

Each alternative is expected to require the relocation of PPG Brine Wall Infrastructure, and protective measures may be required for the Mason-Dixon Line Monument, as it is in close proximity to the road.

Alternative Three could potentially impact an electrical tower.

None of the options would affect cemeteries. However, a retaining wall may be required for Alternative One. A wall also would be needed for Alternative One near Bayer Heritage Federal Credit Union. Alternative Two would take the credit union, while Alternative Three would not impact the credit union.

W.Va. Senator Charles Clements, R-Wetzel, who also serves as the executive director of the authority, asked Suwaid when one of the alternatives would be chosen. Suwaid said costs and environmental impact would have to be considered.

“It’s a process, and it is a detailed process,” Suwaid said.

He said the environmental phase would include study of impacts on waterways and historical landmarks. Suwaid said an alignment would need to be chosen before “hardcore design.”

Suwaid also shed light on the Franklin to Kent W.Va. 2 expansion. This project was restarted, thanks to the passage of the road bond referendum.

Suwaid said a public meeting has not been established yet on the that project, and he did not know the reason. Clements inquired as to whether the Proctor to Kent project could be expedited. Suwaid said the environmental and design phases take time, and he felt the year 2020 was the “best case scenario” for a start date.

Wetzel County resident Steve Conlon said he felt the justification for the Proctor to Kent project to be “very troubling.” He said he finds no citizens who have a problem traveling from Proctor to Moundsville. Conlon claimed the economic development aspect “is being held in front of us like a carrot.” Conlon said he sees the project as “a bum deal for us.”

Conlon said crossing the W.Va. 2 railroad tracks in New Martinsville is a bigger issue for residents, along with getting through New Martinsville, Paden City and Sistersville.

Conlon said he couldn’t understand spending \$80 million “in hopes of some kind of return.”

Suwaid said land use, environmental impact and costs are all criteria being considered for the project. Suwaid said the purpose of the National Environmental Policy Act process is to “get public input into the evaluation of the best option.”

As for other local projects, Suwaid said a road expansion project in Moundsville has already been awarded. He said this project is a GARVEE bond-funded project, and the prep work has already begun. Clements clarified that GARVEE bonds are repaid through future federal funds, while general obligation bonds — which are paying for the W.Va. 2 expansion projects — will be paid for with the already-increased DMV fees, gasoline taxes and automobile sales tax.

Clements said the project pertains to a stretch of highway in Moundsville, from McDonald’s to Pizza Hut. He said the project would “improve the area very much.”

Suwaid said the New Cumberland W.Va. 2 widening project, a general obligation bond project, is at the same status as the Proctor to Kent project. He said no proposed alternative has been chosen yet.

However, a Proctor bridge project appears to be progressing. Suwaid said the project has been awarded to a contractor; he agreed the project should begin in spring.

Clements questioned Suwaid about the New Martinsville to Hannibal, Ohio bridge. Plans to paint the bridge have not progressed. Suwaid said he has pushed Department of Transportation upper management to push the project, “only to get constrained with having issues with the estimates being above our engineers’ estimates.”

When asked if the bridge was structurally sound, Suwaid said consultants — who inspect the state’s bridges — would not allow traffic on the bridges unless they had high confidence that the bridges are sound.

“If we suspect any kind of structural issues, we would restrict traffic. Our infrastructure, in many situations, has passed design life and needs some rehab. That is why we are happy that the referendum has passed, and now we have needed funds to tackle the huge workload at hand.”

Clements commended Suwaid for the work he has done since becoming district engineer.

“I don’t know how many of you travel to Morgantown, but there is not a pothole from New Martinsville to the Monongalia line. It has never been in as good shape as it is now, and we are in the process of getting (W.Va. 20) to that same standard. (W.Va. 2), from New Martinsville to Moundsville, has never been in as good shape as it is right now.

“Gus has done such a tremendous job,” Clements said.

Suwaid said he wanted to thank the Ohio Valley, which occupied the “number one spot statewide” in favoring the referendum.

“Ohio County, Marshall County and Wetzel County were the highest-leading counties as far as favorability,” he said.

Conlon said it should be noted that only 11 percent of citizens voted.

“That is a pretty sad statement,” he said.

Suwaid agreed that it was sad, “but ultimately, the people that did their due research would disagree, no matter what political spectrum is, the referendum and the additional funds are needed.”

“Our infrastructure is screaming that it needs the rehab.”
