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Major projects aim to eliminate congestion at Munster intersection



Provided

An artist's rendering offers the northeast view of the proposed 45th Street grade separation from Canadian National railroad tracks.

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MUNSTER | Massive traffic backups at Calumet Avenue and 45th Street caused by trains might become part of the town's history in the next six years.

A two-phase grade-separation project calls for reconfiguring what is arguably the most congested train-impacted intersection in Northwest Indiana or the south suburbs.

The Canadian National rail lines will run along an overpass, allowing vehicles on Calumet Avenue to travel unimpeded northbound and southbound. Additionally, a new section of 45th Street from east of Columbia Avenue will curve south and west, heading under the rail crossing and intersecting Calumet at the current intersection south of the tracks.

During morning and evening rush hour, this intersection is normally busy, but add a train with the typical 100-plus freight cars, and heavy traffic becomes gridlocked any time of day, Munster Town Manager Tom DeGiulio said.

"It usually takes four changes of the light signal to get everyone through who was waiting for the train to go past," DeGiulio said. "That's 45 minutes."

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[Calumet Avenue/45th Street grade separation](#)

Long delays at Calumet and 45th aren't exclusive to rush hour. On July 2, for instance, Saturday afternoon traffic wasn't all that heavy. But the gates at the CN tracks were down for a stretch of more than 45 minutes for two trains, one of which sat idling for a prolonged period.

The plans call for a new stretch of 45th to run through the current site of the Munster Steel Co. fabrication plant and allow east-west traffic to cross Calumet Avenue instead of having to turn onto Calumet for a short stretch to cross the tracks. The reconfiguration still will allow westbound cars on 45th to turn onto Columbia Avenue and head toward the medical campuses to the north.

Four regionally based companies are working together on the design engineering, which is about 20 to 25 percent completed, DeGiulio said.

The designs by Robinson Engineering, J.F. New environmental/ecological solutions, DLZ Construction and Linden Group Architects are expected to be available early next year. Joe Nordman, of Robinson Engineering, is the project's lead engineer.

The approval process for the designs also is long and multifaceted, DeGiulio said. One of the major hurdles is getting the approval of the Indiana Department of Transportation, which is planned for late in 2012. Because of the federal funding being used, specific design elements must be part of the bridges. There also are some environmental issues.

Currently, the timetable for work on the Calumet Avenue grade separation includes:

- Design for the 45th Street underpass to be completed in 2012. After INDOT approves designs, construction bids will be let. The Calumet Avenue portion will be constructed second.
- Construction is expected to begin on the 45th Street reconfiguration in 2012 or 2013 and continue for two seasons.
- Design for Calumet Avenue is expected to be finished in 2013.
- Bids for the Calumet grade separation could be let in 2014 and the project completed by 2016.

Imagining what this area could develop into is possible now because of renderings created by the companies involved in the design.

Shown from different angles and heights, the renderings illustrate how residential and commercial development co-exist with pedestrian and bike pathways. Creative masonry work accents the walls that will be part of this massive redevelopment. Extensive landscaping also creates a welcoming atmosphere for visitors, residents and employees of new area businesses, DeGiulio said.

"We started looking at this in 2004," DeGiulio said. "Now, it's all about the money."

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