

# Future clearer for Calumet Avenue overhaul in Munster



Jim Bis, file, The Times

Cars turn left onto 45th Street while southbound vehicles turn right onto Calumet Avenue off 45th Street from the west.

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MUNSTER | For drivers battling an increased number of long trains on railroad tracks and heavy traffic along Calumet Avenue and two portions of 45th Avenue, the proposed underpass/overpass project probably can't start soon enough.

Yet the project appears closer to reality than at any time in more than 70 years, according to Munster town officials and engineering consultants from South Holland-based Robinson Engineering.

"In 1941, the extension of Calumet Avenue to U.S. 30 and the construction of a grade separation at Calumet Avenue were high priority projects in Northwest Indiana," Munster Town Manager Thomas DeGiulio, Munster said.

The underpass was planned for construction during the summer of 1942 with Henry Ford promoting the project. The Ford Motor Co. owned hundreds of acres in the southwest corner of town and the hangar at the Lansing Airport, DeGiulio said.

## For your information

### STAGE 1 PLANS TACKLE 45TH AVENUE FIRST

The long-awaited underpass/overpass grade separation at Calumet Avenue and 45th Street is projected to begin construction bidding in the spring of 2015.

The initial construction will involve 45th Street.

Construction crews will build 800 feet of 45th Street east of the current intersection of 45th and Calumet Avenue, according to Joe Nordman, PE, senior project manager.

An underpass will connect the north and south sides of the road. The east-west section will end several hundred feet east of Southwood

"It sounds like World War II took over the priority of this improvement and the extension of Calumet Avenue to U.S. 30," he said. "It was not until the 1990s that Calumet was extended from Main Street to U.S. 30."

DeGiulio stressed the underpass/overpass concept "is a bi-state project, not a Munster street project" because it will benefit the entire region.

"It's of great importance to the Illiana region," he said.

Robinson Engineering's senior project manager Joe Nordman said the first phase of the grade separation will be ready for bidding in the spring of 2015. Robinson Engineering was hired to oversee the project.

"There's a flurry of things going on right now," Nordman said during a recent meeting of the Munster Town Council referring to the plans that are in various stages of completion.

Stage 1 plans were recently submitted to the Indiana Department of Transportation, considered the first milestone of the project that is expected to take five to six years to finish.

"These plans are considered to be 25 percent of the project," Nordman said. "Comments will be made by INDOT and returned within 30 to 45 days."

DeGiulio said this document will be part of the package needed for INDOT to authorize the project.

Nordman also recently met with key representatives of Canadian National Railroad who will be involved in the overpass portion of this project that will elevate the train tracks above the roadways.

"We approached them about the possibility of looking at options for the bypass (called a shoo-fly) that could help reduce costs of the overall project. We want to avoid spending money that is only good for temporary improvement that would have to be torn out as the project is completed," Nordman said.

"A full-blown shoo-fly is \$6-8 million and we would need one for each project (45th and Calumet Avenue)," he said. "Being able to reduce this cost will help pay for the overall costs of the two separations."

"We are exploring alternatives with the higher ups in CN and will also be working with INDOT," Nordman said. "What these are is somewhat premature to state."

The cost projection for each phase of this project is now \$20-\$25 million, which includes the two complete bypasses.

"If we can reduce that to \$17-18 million by saving on the shoo-fly design and cost that will be our goal," DeGiulio said. "As INDOT and the engineers work through design-and-build concepts, we will look at value engineering concepts."

He said much of the cost will be borne by the state of Indiana, with some funding coming from the Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, the federal government and from Munster's tax increment financing funds. An 80-20 funding split is planned.

On Sept. 12, DeGiulio will present the scope of this project to NIRPC's Joint Study Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, chaired by State Rep. Ed Soliday, R-Valparaiso.

"I will present my case for the state to be the major financier of this regional project," DeGiulio said.

and several hundred feet west of the intersection of West 45th and Calumet Avenue, he said.

This portion of the road will run through the current site of Munster Steel, which is being moved to Hammond and will take two years to complete.

The CN tracks will be elevated on an overpass that will take trains above the roadways at the new 45th Avenue roadway and Calumet Avenue.

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