

Plan for grade separation at Calumet Avenue & 45th Street moving ahead

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After nearly seven years, dreams of eliminating long traffic backups because of trains at 45th Street and Calumet Avenue are closer to reality.

In March, the Munster Redevelopment Commission reviewed concepts for grade separation - an underpass for vehicle traffic under elevated railroad tracks that will carry Canadian National trains. Robinson Engineering and the Linden Group are working on the plans which are a top priority for the redevelopment commission, said Rob Mangus, president of the commission. The

Redevelopment Commission members are also members of the Munster Town Council.

In March 2009, Munster received \$3 million in federal funding for the planning and engineering of this project. The total engineering cost is expected to be \$3.5 million and the grade separation phase will cost \$625,000 with the town responsible for 20% or \$125,000.00. This expense will be paid from the Major Moves Fund.

Additional funding will come from the Munster Tax Increment Financing (TIF) District revenues. TIF funds are property taxes paid by businesses in the district that are returned to the municipality and used for capital projects. The Munster Redevelopment Commission has charge of those funds.

Phase 1 of the two-phase plan would include a realignment of 45th Street at the Munster Steel site. Currently 45th Street dog-legs at Calumet Avenue north of the CN tracks, and picks up again southwest of the tracks. Renderings show that street curving under elevated tracks.

Another rendering shows how vehicular traffic will move under the railroad track overpass along Calumet Avenue.

Pedestrian sidewalks and an elevated pedestrian bridge allow foot traffic on either side of 45th Street. Sidewalks with decorative fencing also parallel the traffic lanes of Calumet Avenue.

Solid architecturally designed walls will line 45th Street and Calumet Avenue, allowing green spaces and room for possible multi-story housing.

An elevated bike path, part of the Pennsy Greenway trail, could also be built along the railroad tracks. A decorative wrought iron sign with "Pennsy Greenway" over the 45th Street grade separation would visually tie the project together with the multi-community bike path.

Recently, Robinson Engineering personnel met with CN officials to discuss the plan. The estimate cost of the project is still being determined. Preliminary figures could be available in May.

Phase 1 will take about two years once construction starts. Phase 2 construction will take another

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two years. The total time from start to finish could be six years.

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