

Compromise on bypass reached

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Redesigned access of the bypass to Wilsonville Road will allow thoroughfare to proceed on schedule



GARY ALLEN - A compromise between the various agencies on the design of how motorists will access Wilsonville Road from the Newberg-Dundee bypass has been struck and will allow construction on the thoroughfare to continue unabated toward a late-2017 opening.

The contentious disagreement about the eastern end of first phase of the Newberg-Dundee bypass has ended with an agreement to build a new intersection south of the planned bypass terminus, appeasing the concerns that traffic would continue off the new highway straight onto Wilsonville Road.

It's something of a surprise conclusion to an issue that has been growing for years but really began to boil over last summer.

The bypass ends at Highway 219 and in the original design Wilsonville Road was planned to connect with the highway directly across from the bypass terminus. The Ladd Hill Neighborhood Association, which represents homeowners on Wilsonville Road and connecting roads in both Yamhill and Clackamas counties, voiced concerns that some cars would opt to cut down Wilsonville Road as a shortcut toward I-5, and began talking with the Oregon Department of Transportation about an alternative design.

Those talks resulted in an ODOT proposal that the intersection be constructed in a “no-through” design that would not allow traffic to cross Highway 219 coming from either the bypass or Wilsonville Road, and would force cars to turn north or south instead.

The Newberg City Council, however, took exception to the additional traffic that could be diverted onto city streets rather than down Wilsonville Road.

The issue ended up at the Newberg planning commission, which voted in early January to hold off on making a decision and recommended all the parties work together to find an amenable way to mitigate impacts of the proposed no-through intersection.

Timing was tight as the construction contract for the eastern terminus improvements was set to go out to bid in February. ODOT officials indicated a decision would need to be made by roughly March in order to keep things on track for the 2017 phase one completion. The LHNA had warned it could seek an injunction against construction if Newberg dismissed its concerns and went ahead with the through-through intersection.

Discussions since the planning commission's postponement culminated in a fast-paced email exchange, and finally a signed letter from six groups – representatives from Newberg, Yamhill County, Wilsonville,

Clackamas County, ODOT and the LHNA — to Rep. John Davis, who represents Wilsonville and had expressed interest in helping to solve the disagreement, on Feb. 12.

Rather than mitigating the no-through intersection, the emails actually came up with another plan altogether.

One of the eight alternatives ODOT had looked into, before ultimately recommending the no-through intersection, was the construction of a new intersection between Wilsonville Road and Highway 219, down south of Wyooski Road. ODOT initially shied away from that option due to the new right-of-way that would need to be purchased and the estimated three years it would take to complete.

When the six stakeholders revisited the issue during the email exchange, though, that option was floated again and began to look more feasible. It would mean not building any intersection across from the bypass terminus, and that saved money could go toward purchase of the new right-of-way and associated construction costs.

During the three-year buildout period the groups proposed to leave the Wilsonville Road alignment as it is today, connecting with Springbrook Road. To mitigate an increase in traffic from the bypass, traffic will only be allowed to turn onto Wilsonville Road while coming from Highway 219, while traffic can only exit Wilsonville Road by turning right onto Springbrook Road.

This option allows the bypass to stay on schedule and rose to the top of the stakeholder discussions. Each party signed the letter to Davis, and then took the proposal before their respective governing bodies. The City Council considered and approved the plan last Monday, while the Yamhill County Board of Commissioners approved it later in the week. Each of the other groups has also signed off on the plan as well.

Still, not everyone is satisfied with the new arrangement.

“My friends and neighbors still are not happy with this accommodation of the six parties,” Councilor Stephen McKinney said, explaining that the additional cost to build the new intersection as well as the potential disruption for Newberg traffic is concerning.

He gave the example of a friend who lives on Wilsonville Road and how a trip to Fred Meyer becomes cumbersome. Getting there is no problem under the new configuration, but the return trip is disrupted as the friend cannot turn left onto Wilsonville Road from Springbrook Road, and must instead take a roundabout path to travel onto Wilsonville Road.

“To get home becomes an exercise that takes time, effort, resources, gasoline and burns up some tires,” McKinney said.

That means it could create a new bottleneck situation, and in a worst case scenario, McKinney said, the new traffic configuration of right-in right-outs barring certain movements could increase the chance of accidents.

“One of my bigger concerns was I wanted to see the killing field shrink rather than enlarge, and I think we’ve probably successfully enlarged the killing field,” he concluded.

Councilor Scott Essin said he initially planned to oppose the agreement, but that his concerns had been mostly addressed by ODOT’s agreement to monitor the traffic situation at the intersection of Highway 99W and Springbrook Road, as well as other traffic impacts that might arise.

He also noted that The Greens neighborhood, which he lives in and which was largely opposed to the no-through plan as residents feared it would funnel traffic onto their neighborhood streets, worked well with the LHNA on the alternative.

The agreement indicates that ODOT will “identify and allocate funding” by the end of April to be used in designing and building the new Wilsonville Road connecting intersection south of Wyooski Road. The bypass will retain its existing design.

ODOT area manager Tim Potter was at the meeting and noted that ODOT estimates a \$7 million price tag for the new intersection.

“We don’t believe it will go much over that,” he said.

Once ODOT removes the through-through design from the construction contract, and once several TSP-related details have been updated for Newberg and Yamhill County, each party has also agreed not to seek state intervention by the Land Conservation and Development commission, as the LHNA and others once explored, through a “compatibility determination.”

That process was opposed by Newberg officials as it would have brought in the LCDC to make a final decision on the controversy, overriding Newberg’s local governance.

With the agreement inked by the six players, state intervention and lawsuits are no longer part of the picture. And while many of the stakeholders don’t see this solution as ideal, that suggests it’s a successful compromise.

LHNA representative Stan Halle commended the planning commission decision in January that set the stage for the final agreement, and again emphasized that the LHNA and other groups share Newberg’s desire to see the next phases of the bypass funded and built.

The full bypass, he noted, is the ultimate solution to the concerns voiced by McKinney.

“We want to work with you to continue to make this a reality so that we don’t have to, either on the short term or long term, live with this congestion and the failure of various intersections for very long at all,” Halle said.

But for the time being, there is a path forward and one less roadblock toward phase one completion.

“Many months ago we asked for a compromise and this a compromise,” Councilor Denise Bacon said as the council voted 6-1 to approve the solution.