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Story last updated at 11:23 a.m. Tuesday, December 9, 2003

MoDOT makes case for U.S. 24 medians

By David Tanner
The Examiner

The question of a future median on U.S. 24 in eastern Independence got a little more clear Monday, as Missouri Department of Transportation representatives stated their case.

Council members asked **MoDOT** engineer Norm Beeman to reassure them that the department would not be putting a solid median all the way from Missouri 291 to the Blue Mills area.

Traffic engineers have been telling us these things for years. We just didn't listen."

Norm Beeman
Missouri Department of
Transportation engineer

Businesses along the 2.5 mile stretch are protesting by contacting the city and **MoDOT** and encouraging customers to sign a petition against any and all median proposals.

Beeman said the idea is not to discourage turns into businesses, just to increase safety by reducing the potential for accidents.

Beeman presented **MoDOT's** access-management standards.

"Fifty-five percent of accidents are related to access," Beeman said.

A typical intersection, Beeman said, has 36 possible points to have a wreck.

A controlled area, such as right-in and right-out only, would have only two possible accident points, he said.

Beeman compared U.S. 24 to the congested Missouri 7 in Blue Springs.

"There's a high crash rate out there," he said, using a **MoDOT** formula based on accidents per million vehicle miles. "Traffic engineers have been telling us these things for years. We just didn't listen," he said, using an example of businesses using political clout to get curb cuts and extra driveways.

Council members asked Beeman to make sure **MoDOT** has the proper public hearings and listens to public input.

Beeman said every comment is taken into account.

MoDOT project manager Susan McCubbins said the state has contacted the Independence and Fort Osage fire agencies. She said **MoDOT** will have a public hearing in late January or early February.

MoDOT found safety concerns and high accident rates when engineers studied the stretch for a future pavement replacement. Benefits of medians, Beeman said, include fewer crashes, a pedestrian refuge and a reduction in travel time.

A highway like U.S. 24 has too many driveways, he said, and many of them are dangerously close to signaled intersections.

MoDOT is not proposing an unbroken median, he said, but the state may use a median with strategic points of access at signaled intersections, a few unsignaled intersections, and high-traffic business areas.

Independence Public Works Director Howard Penrod submitted a letter of concern to the state when he started getting complaints from U.S. 24 businesses. He said the **MoDOT** representatives seemed sincere about getting public input.

"I think they made a good case," Penrod said. "They have to keep looking at the local interests also."

Smart Moves

In other business the council discussed metro-wide public transportation with Mel Henderson, director of transportation with the Mid-America Regional Council.

Henderson talked about a long-term, multi-million dollar plan called Smart Moves, which will increase access around the metro through public transportation.

Citizens have stated in surveys that public transportation is a priority, Henderson said.

The Smart Moves system would cost \$155 million a year including capital and operating costs, he said.

MARC is designing a grid of transportation routes for suburbs and cities, including buses and rail. They would be called the Rapid Rider, Freeway Flyer and Local Link routes.

Henderson said the city of Olathe, Kan., has an existing rail line to connect commuters and shoppers to downtown Kansas City.

Council Member Jim Schultz said Independence also has a rail line to the Crown Center area, but Independence was not on the MARC plan for rail.

Henderson said the way to get heard is to keep voicing an opinion. The project is years away, he said, and would take funding from a future sales tax issue.

The council also:

n Re-appointed Nina Anders and Rick Hemmingsen, and appointed Roberta Coker and Greg Hunsucker to the Tourism Advisory Board, and replaced resigned board member Eddie Vergara with Kevin Williams.

n Re-appointed Bev Stephens, Nancy Sue Scott and Marilyn Caples to the Citizens With Disabilities Advisory Board

n Re-appointed Council Members Jason White and Jim Schultz to the Storm Water Control Oversight Committee.

n Discussed the future senior adult center in the old Palmer Junior High School, and compared it to the existing meals program at the Sermon Center. Please see related story.

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