

Fellows St. changes in works

InDOT plans overpass; city wants to widen; residents worried

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SOUTH BEND - As Annette Pilkington and Beth McKillip look out at Fellows Street in front of their homes, the last thing they want to see is more traffic.

But more traffic is just what's coming to the residential area north of Ireland Road.

The Indiana Department of Transportation is planning to build a bridge that will carry Fellows over the St. Joseph Valley Parkway, also known as the U.S. 20 bypass, and connect it with neighborhoods south of the highway.

InDOT spokesman Jim Pinkerton said the overpass will be needed for emergency responders to reach those neighborhoods south of the bypass more easily after the agency finishes upgrading U.S. 31 to a limited-access highway between Plymouth and South Bend.

Under the state's design, Fellows will extend south of Ireland and curve slightly to the west, crossing the bypass to connect with Carroll Street at Jackson Road.

South Bend officials are working on their own project in reaction to the planned overpass, which the Michiana Area Council of Governments estimates will direct an additional 8,000 vehicles per day onto Fellows north of Ireland.

City planner Bill Schallioli said officials are looking at widening Fellows, currently a two-lane street, north to Chippewa Avenue.

He said this also is an opportunity to improve problematic intersections at Chippewa and Barbie Street that have become more prone to accidents as drivers increasingly use the neighborhood as a cut-through route to retail areas along Ireland.

Schallioli said city officials are still studying data from surveys area residents filled out during a public meeting in May.

Jason Durr, a senior civil engineer with Christopher B. Burke Engineering, which is working on the project, said the city and the firm expect to prepare a concept drawing of the new Fellows by early next month. That drawing, he said, will show the street's new alignment and any property that needs to be acquired.

Durr said the city will hold another public meeting when that concept is ready.

McKillip and Pilkington said residents along Fellows are concerned about the effect a wider road and more traffic will have on safety and home values in the neighborhood.

“The traffic is bad as it is through here,” McKillip said while a speeding pickup truck rumbled noisily past her house. “I don’t see how this is going to help.”

Pilkington said she would like the city to install speed bumps to discourage drivers from using the street as a north-south thoroughfare.

“There already is a lot of traffic. It doesn’t seem wise to send more through our neighborhood, because it is a residential neighborhood,” she said. “Who do you want to protect: the people who use this for convenience or the people who live here?”

InDOT is scheduled to begin working in the spring on the bridges to carry Fellows over the bypass and Jackson over the new U.S. 31. Pinkerton said work should be completed by the end of 2013.

Schalliol said he hopes the city’s Fellows project will be done by the time the new overpass opens to traffic.

Pinkerton said InDOT is beginning to acquire properties in the area south of the bypass.

The project will not impact the South East Little League fields in that area, he said. InDOT will need to acquire a rear driveway on the west side of the Little League property, but it will improve the entrance to the fields off of Jackson Road.