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Methuen rotary plans taking shape

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METHUEN — Residents turned out last night to hear the plans for the rotary at the intersection of Interstate 93 and routes 110 and 113.

Roughly 100 residents were on hand as MassDOT officials and engineers from Jacobs Engineering detailed the \$75 million proposal to scrap the rotary for a "partial cloverleaf-type" interchange, install five new traffic signals, and add new on- and off-ramps.

MassDOT project manager Ryan McNeill delivered a presentation on the plan during the public hearing, pointing out the changes to be made and the importance of the project.

"It's pretty obvious that the key issues are congestion and safety," McNeill said.

Construction of the new proposal will eliminate one of the region's most dangerous intersections. McNeill pointed out during his presentation that crashes in the rotary are seven times more likely than in other areas of the region.

Chris Metzemaekers, who attended the meeting, said she was in an accident two years ago in the rotary in which a car hit the side of her vehicle. Although nobody was hurt and the damage "wasn't outrageous," Metzemaekers said she is happy to see the rotary construction project nearing completion because the rotary is far too dangerous.

"You can look up at any given time and can see a tow truck or a police car out there," Metzemaekers said.

Funding for the project has not been identified, but the plans for the project continue. MassDOT plans to start construction in 2014, reporting that construction would be take three and a half years.

Completing the project will require the state to remove four houses in the area. Additionally, there will be partial takings from nine residential properties and 11 commercial properties.

The project also includes plans for two noise barriers. One noise barrier will be northeast of the rotary, reducing noise levels for homes on Cherry Hill Circle and on Smith Avenue. The second barrier will be southeast of the rotary, reducing noise levels for Noyes Street and Lincoln Street residents. Both neighborhoods must vote to approve the noise barriers.

McNeill said MassDOT will meet with residents in those areas in April and March and he believes the noise barriers will be approved easily.

"I'd be shocked if anyone voted 'no,'" McNeill said. "They've been asking for them since the beginning of the project."

Part of the construction will affect wetlands in the area, so MassDOT will replace the wetlands nearby. McNeill outlined plans for a wetlands restoration about a mile away at the Loosigian Farms site at 18 Lowell Blvd. The former commercial nursery, now abandoned, will undergo conversion into wetlands including removal of contaminated soil.

The \$75 million plan also includes provisions for more sidewalks, safe bike paths, new street lighting, and money for landscaping.

Residents raised various concerns, with many people surprised that area residents would have to vote to get a noise barrier added. Other residents in attendance asked about construction taking place at night.

"We can't cut I-93 off during rush hour, so we will have to conduct some activity at night or on the weekends," McNeill said. "I'm not making any promises. We've heard you and we've committed to doing as much work as possible during the day."

State Rep. Linda Dean Campbell, D-Methuen, attended the hearing along with West District City Councilors Jeanne Pappalardo and James Hajjar and Councilor-at-large Stephen Zanni.

Pappalardo, who attended the hearing with her husband, Joseph, said the project is long overdue.

"They've definitely needed that," Pappalardo said. "They needed it a long time ago."

Joseph Pappalardo, a former Methuen city councilor, agreed.

"That rotary has been a nightmare for years," Joseph Pappalardo said. "I call it the 'kamikaze highway' when you hit it."

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