Orland Park planning to bring roundabouts to village

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While traffic roundabouts are becoming fairly commonplace in other parts of the country, they're a scarcity in the south and southwest suburbs despite being touted as a quicker, safer way to move traffic through intersections.

They replace stop signs and stop lights at four-way intersections, and have been lauded as a way to dramatically reduce crashes, particularly those involving injuries.

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A rare such roundabout is in South Holland at the intersection of Cottage Grove Avenue and 166th Street, although Orland Park expects to start construction on one next spring and plans a second roundabout.

By their design, roundabouts are intended to reduce or eliminate head-on and T-bone crashes, with all traffic going around the circle in the same direction. Cars approaching yield to traffic already in the roundabout.

The roundabout at the intersection of Ravinia Avenue and 147th Street, directly east of village hall, is expected to cost $2.4 million, with 70 percent of the funding coming from federal sources and Orland Park responsible for the remaining 30 percent of the total cost for the work, according to Joe La Margo, Orland Park's interim village manager.

The village has acquired the needed land for the intersection work, and "we are ready to go," he said Thursday.

"The benefits are it improves traffic flow, so you have an increase in traffic capacity," La Margo said of the roundabout. "You have less idling of cars (at a stop) so there is savings as far as gas and you see reduced emissions."

He said it is a natural extension of the village's "Smart Living" sustainability efforts.

"We try and be as green as we can and we look at different ways to create traffic-calming situations and roundabouts are one of those ways," La Margo said.

The work will involve a reconfiguration of the village hall parking areas and improvements to Ravinia and 147th as they approach the roundabout, he said.

A second roundabout is planned in the village at the intersection of 151st Street and West Avenue, but the timetable for when work might begin is up in the air and could be dependent on next year's village budget for capital improvements, La Margo said. It would also be coordinated with the planned widening of 151st, he said.

Eighty percent of the funding for the 151st/West Avenue roundabout would come from federal transportation sources, with the village picking up the remaining 20 percent of the total cost, he said. That roundabout is estimated to cost $1.5 million, La Margo said.

Apart from when capital funds would be earmarked to fund the roundabout, he said, village officials realize residents are going through "construction fatigue," with the major rebuilding and widening of LaGrange Road just having wrapped up and the project to widen 159th Street continuing through next year.

Officials a number of years ago gave the green light for the 147th/Ravinia roundabout, but held off starting construction because they knew Ravinia would see heavier traffic as drivers used it as an alternative to LaGrange

while construction was taking place.

Initial engineering work on that roundabout has been done, and the village plans to spend about $100,000 for additional engineering work in advance of a detailed design for the project.

The first and only south suburban roundabout was dedicated in South Holland in June 2008 as "Freedom Circle" to honor public safety personnel, military personnel and military veterans.

Tinley Park officials in October 2015 voted to not go ahead with plans for a roundabout at the intersection of 183rd Street and Oak Park Avenue. Officials had also considered additional roundabouts along 175th Street at the intersections of Ridgeland, 84th and 94th avenues.

Accurate figures on how many roundabouts there are in the U.S. is sketchy, but public records and news reports put the number at around 5,000. Just a handful are in the Chicago metro area, and there are some in the Champaign-Urbana metro area.

According to the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, one roundabout is under construction in the metro area and 10, including the two planned in Orland Park, are in some phase of engineering.

Indiana, through the end of 2016, had 256 roundabouts and a dozen more were in the planning stages, according to the state's transportation department. Public records show Wisconsin having more than 130 of them. According to the Federal Highway Administration, approximately 150 to 250 roundabouts are built each year in the U.S.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, roundabouts reduce accidents at intersections by 40 percent, cut injuries resulting from accidents by 80 percent, and fatalities from accidents by 90 percent.

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