

KDOT outlines key points of Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor



Kane County Department of Transportation Deputy Director Tom Rickert and Erica Spolar, vice president of Hampton, Lenzini and Renwick Inc., were some of the speakers at a press briefing about Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor Wednesday. (Gloria Casas / The Courier-News)

By **Gloria Casas**
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Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor is the most environmentally sound option the Kane County Department of Transportation has to alleviate traffic congestion in the northern part of the county, officials said Wednesday.

It is one of the messages Kane County Department of Transportation (KDOT) wants to give county residents ahead of an Aug. 30 public hearing on the \$115 million Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor project.

Longmeadow Parkway is a 5.6 mile roadway that includes a toll bridge over the Fox River. It has been discussed or in planning stages for more than 20 years. KDOT recently completed an Environmental Assessment reevaluation required by the Federal Highway Administration. As part of the reevaluation, KDOT must hold a public hearing on the project.

Kane County Department of Transportation Deputy Director Tom Rickert outlined the process at a press briefing Wednesday at Algonquin Village Hall. Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor crosses three villages: Algonquin, Carpentersville and Barrington Hills. The Environmental Assessment reevaluation was done because some portions of the original assessment were outdated, including a noise study and the list of endangered species affected by construction, he said.

The reevaluation showed there continues to be a need for a new bridge because the region's population is growing, Rickert said. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) estimates the populations of Rutland, Dundee, Algonquin and Grafton Townships combined will increase by 146,000 by the year 2040, he said. The data is based on 2014 figures, he said. The northern Kane County area is one of the fastest growing in the county, he said.

The growth will translate to more traffic on already stretched roads, Rickert said.

Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor has the least impact on the environment compared to other locations or even not building a bridge at all, he said. Longmeadow Parkway impacts fewer neighborhoods compared to other locations and will help improve air quality due to idling and traffic congestion, Rickert said.

If a bridge is not built, neighborhood streets, like those surrounding Main Street in Carpentersville, will continue to deal with traffic backups and the traffic will cause wear and tear on the roads, he said.

Kane County Department of Transportation approaches projects with three principles in mind: avoid, minimize and mitigate, Rickert said. So, if removing trees can't be avoided, KDOT is minimizing and mitigating the impact, he said. For example, the reevaluation states 5,765 trees, in poor health or dead, will be affected by the project. KDOT plans to plant an additional 11,530 high quality native trees, or two new trees for every one removed, he said.

Longmeadow Parkway is affecting 4.6 acres of wetlands, but KDOT will do mitigation on 17.6 acres. Mitigation includes creating whole new wetlands, Rickert said.

Mitigation is also being done to protect endangered species like Blanding's Turtle, native mussels, Northern Long-eared bats, Bald Eagles and numerous fish, said Erica Spolar, a vice president of Hampton, Lenzini and Renwick Inc., an engineering consulting firm working on the project.

There were new endangered species added to a list since the original Environmental Assessment was done so the county had to make plans on how to protect those animals, Spolar said. The Environmental Assessment reevaluation calls for construction crews to be trained to deal with Blanding's turtles and to do some work during off season so the endangered species won't be affected, she said.

Rickert finds a common misconception, based on comments he's seen from residents, is the project will increase taxes. The reality is Longmeadow Parkway is funded by \$14.5 million in federal monies, \$39.4 million in state funding and about \$61.1 million from the county, he said.

KDOT has already invested about \$31.1 million and the remaining balance of its share, \$30 million, will be funded by selling bonds, he said. Revenues from the toll, expected to be set between 50 cents and 75 cents, will pay off the bond debt, Rickert said. A decision on issuing bonds — and the amount — could be made by fall 2017, he said. The toll would be eliminated after the bonds are repaid, he said.

There would be no new taxes created to fund Longmeadow Parkway, KDOT Assistant Director Steve Coffinbarger said.

Opponents to the project have vowed to continue efforts to stop it including holding a binding referendum on the bond issue question and taking the county to court. Residents who oppose the project will be able to voice their opinion at the public hearing.

Rickert said KDOT has worked with Algonquin and Carpentersville for years on the project and both villages have included Longmeadow Parkway Bridge Corridor on their comprehensive plans.

"This isn't just Kane County moving forward, this project has been done in cooperation and jointly with a number of different environmental groups, a number of different regulatory agencies, three municipalities and the (Kane County) Forest Preserve District," Rickert said. "We continue to be the lead agency, but we do it in partnership with the agencies."

Gloria Casas is a freelance reporter for The Courier-News.

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