

U.S. 30 corridor presentation made to Fulton Council

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FULTON, Ill. — Officials of the Illinois Department of Transportation and an engineer from a Cedar Rapids consulting firm made a presentation to Fulton's mayor and city aldermen recently, to discuss the status of the proposed U.S. 30 project.

Gil Janes, an engineer with Howard R. Green Company, and Dawn Perkins, the project liaison from the Illinois DOT, were introduced to the council by Shelia Hudson, a marketing subcontractor for the DOT.

Perkins addressed the council, stating the U.S. 30 project was unique, in that "instead of us (DOT) mandating a project to you, your community brought the project idea to us."

Perkins reported a feasibility report had been completed, and that she would be working with city officials, Howard R. Green and the DOT to facilitate continued work on the project. She also indicated she would be able to post updates on the project on the DOT Web site, to keep all principals and the public informed on its status.

Janes then addressed the city officials, giving a presentation on the U.S. 30 project. He cited the years of discussion among the various entities that led to the project's inception, noting his firm had begun U.S. 30 work with Clinton in 1996.

Though Janes acknowledged there is not currently a need for a capacity increase of the Fulton-Rock Falls, Ill., corridor for approximately 15 to 20 years, he said the project, which runs from the U.S. 30-Highway 136 junction to the U.S. 30-Illinois 40 junction in Rock Falls, proposes a four-lane corridor.

The feasibility study, Janes continued, determined there was a need to improve regional mobility, which Janes noted drives economic development. He added he had been working closely with Heather Bennett, tourism director and Fulton chamber executive director, and Betty Steinert, Whiteside County economic development director, on the impact of such project.

Once the need for improvements to the corridor was demonstrated, Janes said, this "got the attention" of state and federal legislators, which led to the earmarking of funds for further work.

The next step, according to Janes, will be Phase I, which includes an environmental impact and phase I design report, a "detailed, rigorous process" Janes estimated it will take approximately 40 months to complete. The length of the studies, Janes explained, was due to the host of issues the environmental report would need to investigate, in order to be in compliance with the Federal Highway Commission as well as the National Environmental Policy Act.

To meet those stringent guidelines, Janes continued, the study has to research the highway project's impact on existing architecture, wetlands, historic areas, noise levels, property acquisitions and a host of other issues. Throughout the study, Janes added, public involvement will be encouraged.

Janes led the audience through a discussion of three "Study Bands" of potential locations for the U.S. 30 corridor. Though there is the obvious option to build the expanded U.S. 30 road along its existing route, Janes said the entities involved would also be determining if the highway should run in an alternative northern or southern location.

Janes presented a timeline through late 2010, which called for preferred corridors being selected, public information meetings, and a "preferred alignment" being selected. During this phase, Janes said a primary concern will be protecting and preserving what Janes referred to as the "Class A farmland" along the corridor.

Following his presentation, Janes solicited questions and feedback from the council. First Ward Alderman Eugene Field asked Janes, "why the foot dragging — why does the study take 40 months?"

Janes responded, defending the need to meet NEPA requirements, adding there will be people "negatively impacted" by the U.S. 30 project, and therefore his group needs "to be sensitive to the people and the environment."

Fourth Ward Alderman Ron Roels asked Janes the cost of the study. Janes estimated that between the various entities, the study's price tag is approximately \$7 million. "Completion," he said, "is wholly dependent upon the funding."

To that end, Janes emphasized to the council the "importance of continuing to speak with a unified voice, to keep the attention of the state of Illinois legislature and senate" — if monies are made available to the project in the form of grants, the match will need to come from the Department of Transportation, and even possibly from the local communities.