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TOP STORY

Napier sidewalk plan calls for three-lane road

By TONY WITTKOWSKI - HP Staff Writer 17 hrs ago

BENTON TOWNSHIP — The recently completed Napier Avenue Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan calls for the heavily trafficked road to be changed to three lanes and for bike lanes to be added.

A draft of the final report is now complete and contains a series of recommended improvements along auto-oriented Napier Avenue. The portion of the street in question – between the St. Joseph River and I-94 – is considered an important east-west transportation route in Berrien County due to its proximity to the highway and M-139 commercial district.

The plan recommends western segments of the corridor between the Lakeland Medical Center and Union Avenue to be rebalanced by converting the current four-lane road configuration into three lanes. The third lane would be turned into a center left-turn lane, which would allow for the installation of bike lanes on each side of the road.

Outside of the roadway, sidewalks would be built with a grassy planting strip, wherever possible, to buffer pedestrians from moving traffic.

The eastern segments of the corridor from Union Avenue to I-94 would be outfitted with a sidewalk on one side of the road and eventually a 10-foot wide shared multi-use pathway on the opposing side of the road during later construction phases.

The multi-use pathway would allow for bicycles, pedestrians and other non-motorized forms of travel to be grade-separated from vehicle travel lanes.

“There have been various accidents out there and there’s a need for something to be done to alleviate safety issues,” St. Joseph Township Manager Denise Cook said Friday. “The work that’s been done so far offers some solutions for that. However, it will be up to our Board of Trustees to decide what they would like to do

with the information being presented.”

Recommendations of the plan were evaluated based on several factors, including projected costs, maintenance needs, traffic and safety impacts, and input received from the public. The plan also identifies potential funding sources local organizations may take advantage of in order to help defray costs.

The plan recommends a number of ways for Napier Avenue to transform to a more “complete street” that accommodates all users and modes of transportation.

SWMPC has been working with St. Joseph Township, Benton Township, Berrien County Road Department and other local partners since late 2017 to reimagine what Napier Avenue could look like in the future.

The section of Napier Avenue has made news over the years for the amount of pedestrian hit-and-runs accidents. Napier, which has four lanes and a 40-mph speed limit, received more attention following the death of a 21-year-old St. Joseph man who was struck and killed by a car on the busy road in January.

Napier Avenue was given a “walking audit” in December by a steering committee that is made up of business owners, residents and township officials.

Talk of sidewalks along Napier Avenue has been ongoing for years, as the main obstacles standing in the way of such a project have been funding and right-of-way feasibility.

More information on the project and a draft of the final report may be found at www.napieravenue.org.

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Napier forum set

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission is expected to reveal draft recommendations for Napier Avenue at a public open house 4-6 p.m. Sept. 24 at Napier Parkview Baptist Church at 245 W. Napier Ave.

The public will be able to review a draft of the plan, view exhibits illustrating potential future improvements, and take a tour of a demonstration showing how and where sidewalks and other improvements could be located – weather permitting.