

HOMER NEWS

Homer Alaska - News

Story last updated at 4:17 PM on Wednesday, September 5, 2012

Lake Street, Pioneer may get roundabout

By Michael Armstrong
Staff Writer

As far back as 2005, Department of Transportation and Public Facilities engineers have proposed roundabouts at Homer's traffic-congested intersections. If plans proceed, Homer could see its first roundabout in 2016 at a three-way stop at the intersection of Lake Street, Pioneer Avenue and East End Road.

Last Thursday, DOT&PF officials held an open house to discuss the roundabout, part of a project to rehabilitate Lake Street from Pioneer Avenue to the Sterling Highway. Homer's lone stoplight at the highway would remain, but turn lane improvements would be done there.

The Lake Street rehabilitation project also would:

- Replace and repair 2,500 feet of pavement, a stretch of state-maintained road notorious for its potholes;
- Build and fix ditches and culverts;
- Add a bike lane or sidewalk with curbs and gutters on the west side of the road; and
- Improve the Pioneer Avenue intersection with either a roundabout or traffic signals.

Engineers have done surveys and soil testing. An environmental document is in preparation and should be complete by 2013. Construction is scheduled to start in 2015 with completion by 2016.

DOT&PF prefers roundabouts because they're cheaper to maintain and are safer and has been building them at many intersections in Anchorage. A three-way roundabout comparable to Lake Street and Pioneer Avenue is the roundabout at Huffman Road and the Old Seward Highway in Anchorage near the Carrs Shopping Center. DOT&PF presented a roundabout as the main option at the Homer intersection, with drawings showing how it would work.

At the open house, visitors asked questions of DOT&PF engineers and staff.

- Would the roundabout work for big trucks?

At the workshop, Jeff Erickson of HomeRun Oil questioned DOT&PF engineer Sean Baski about how big trucks would handle the roundabout, such as a semi- tractor trailer hauling a second trailer and making a left hand turn from East End Road onto Lake Street.

"My main concern is you take a set of doubles at 120 feet, the back tires of the back trailer start cutting inside of everything else," Erickson said. "You can't have a lot of stuff in the middle of it."

Erickson said he gets fuel deliveries from big trucks at his business on East End Road. Lake Street is the route trucks make for deliveries to Spenard Builders Supply and to businesses out East End Road. Erickson urged Baski to run computer models in a roundabout design.

It's not a sure thing that Lake Street and Pioneer Avenue would get a roundabout. At the open house, DOT&PF officials also handed out comment sheets and urged locals to speak up now.

"This is the moment, because it's only conceptual, for the public to say what their priority is," said Joselyn Billoon, area planner for DOT&PF. "The box is open."

To comment or for more information on the Lake Street rehabilitation project, contact:

- Sean Baski, DOT&PF project manager, highway design section, at (907) 269-0547 or email sean.baski@alaska.gov
- Renee Forque, DOT&PF environmental impact analyst, (907) 269-0530 or email renee.forque@alaska.gov.
- Would pedestrian walkways be safe?

The intersection now has striped walkways, and when walkers enter the walkway, drivers are supposed to yield. A roundabout would have sidewalks around the circle. Islands would separate lanes, so to cross a roundabout, a walker would look for traffic in one direction, cross, pause at the island, and then cross the other lane. Cars entering roundabouts yield to cars already in the roundabout and to pedestrians.

Shelly Erickson, who owns Homer Tours and is a partner with her husband in HomeRun Oil, said she was concerned about pedestrian crossings at Lake Street and Pioneer Avenue.

"We have all these kids and bicycles going across all the time. A roundabout won't stop for these people," she said. "We have a pedestrian problem — Homer people will not stop for pedestrians."

- Would the west side have a sidewalk or bike path? Would it be separated?

That's still undecided, DOT&PF engineers said. There could be a sidewalk or there could be a bike lane.

- Would drainage be underground or in ditches?

DOT&PF prefers ditches on Lake Street, engineers said, because of ease of maintenance. Field studies showed that culverts there already are clogging up with silt. Potholes get caused by poor drainage, so one of the goals in the rehabilitation is to fix drainage.

DOT&PF also is considering a roundabout at a more congested Homer intersection, Main Street and the Sterling Highway. Last week at its regular meeting, the Homer City Council approved a resolution backing a roundabout at that intersection.

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