

Supervisor believes intersection proposal OK despite criticism

By Nick Baptista/ The Valley Springs News
January 13, 2012

Nearly five dozen area residents took the opportunity Wednesday night to get a glimpse of proposed improvements to alleviate morning and afternoon traffic jams at the downtown Valley Springs intersection of State Route 12/26.

Staff from the Calaveras County Department of Public Works and Dokken Engineering were on hand in the Valley Springs Elementary School multipurpose room to explain the proposed project and receive feedback from the public.

The proposal to add a right-turn lane from northbound State Route 26 to eastbound State Route 12 heading toward San Andreas did not receive unanimous public support.

During a brief question and answer session, Gary Caldwell of Valley Springs voiced concern the proposed solution was “just a Band-Aid.”

He said the right turn lane proposal was a short-term solution to a long-term problem and the real solutions were either a traffic signal or roundabout at the congested intersection.

Those ideas were considered earlier, but determined to be more costly than the turn-lane addition and would have needed substantial more right-of-way acquisition eliminating downtown parking spaces and possibly several buildings.

District 1 Supervisor Gary Tofanelli said he is finding most people are in favor of the turn-lane proposal, which he brought forward after there was public dissention last year concerning the signal and roundabout alternatives.

“They see it as a good improvement and they like the aesthetics of the town staying intact,” Tofanelli said after Wednesday’s workshop.

He said he understands some people will see things differently, which is “healthy and important.”

The county and Dokken Engineering were particularly interested in community feedback on proposed aesthetic improvements in the project area.

One of the displays at Wednesday’s meeting outlined potential expenditures of nearly \$125,000 to add a planter for low-maintenance native plants, benches, decorative streetlights and the use of colored and stamped concrete at the intersection to improve the area’s aesthetics.

The proposed aesthetic improvements would be intended to “keep the flavor of Valley Springs at the intersection,” said Brian Stephenson of Dokken Engineering.

The goal is to begin construction on the approximately \$1.3 million project in April. Nearly 90 percent of the cost would be paid from federal funds with the 10 percent match coming from county funds already collected through Road Impact Mitigation fees paid for by previous development.

Total construction cost is estimated at \$1 million, while planning/design and right-of-way costs are tabulated at \$300,000.

After Caltrans finishes the environmental review, the proposed project will go to the Board of Supervisors for final consideration.

“I believe we should have the votes, possibly a 5-0 vote for this design,” Tofanelli said.

The timeline calls for completion of the turn-lane project in early 2013.