

Several individuals from the Department of Transportation presented the current status of the study known as the Coulee Region Transportation Study. The study process is referred to as the Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL), a collaborative approach to decision making involving a broad range of stakeholders in the area to include environmental, community and the economic future. The region included in the study is La Crosse, Onalaska, Holmen, West Salem, La Crescent and surrounding communities.

Andrew Winga as the primary presenter related that the DOT had conducted a large number of public meetings including the general public, with local officials, and other agency coordinators. The study has gone on primarily during the year 2015. The DOT has now come out with a series of 6 strategy packages, all of which would include both extensive widening of some roads and new roads. It is difficult to explain with any precision or brevity exactly where all these strategies are located. However, in general the 6 taken together (not each plan would include each of these ideas) would expand Highway 16 to 6 lanes from I-90 to La Crosse Street and make La Crosse Street 4 lanes. The speed limit would not increase. Other packages include a new highway extending U.S. 53 South to connect to River Valley Drive which would be placing new road pavement in the marsh. The proposals vary a bit on how the traffic would get from River Valley Drive to downtown. Some connection would be a 4-lane road on St. Cloud or Gillette Street or a new road from St. James Street to Monitor Street using an old railroad corridor. The Department of Transportation has a summary which you can find on the website at www.CouleeRegionStudy.dot.wi.gov.

In approximately 1989 the League of Women Voters of the La Crosse Area did study the use of the marsh and transportation issues that might impact the marsh. The full consensus positions can be read on the La Crosse League website but in summary the League supports the use of the marsh for water and air quality and purification, flood control, wildlife habitat and as an urban green space. The League supports alternative strategies to alleviate future traffic congestion and opposes any further industrial or commercial development in the marsh and a moratorium on further filling of the marsh.

It is important to continue to monitor the progress of the study as no final plans have been made and the DOT is continuing to study the various impacts including environmental impacts of its 6 strategy packages. There will be more public meetings.

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