NEW HIGHWAY 17 MAY BE EXPRESSWAY

The new Highway 17 scheduled between the City of Green Lake and South Lake may someday be part of the expressway network expanding westward from Bratburg.

The road will be constructed as a two-lane “primary arterial” highway on a new right-of-way large enough for a four-lane road.

The classification “primary arterial” means the road will have limited access. Where the new 17 is constructed next to the old road, the old road will function as a frontage road serving the local streets and highways.

If the project goes well, the new road will be finished sometime in the next three years, said C. M. Head, District Engineer for District 10 of the Department of Transportation.

When the new road is constructed, only the interchange at Highway 46 will be built with four lanes. However, the road probably will be expanded to four lanes sometime in the future and be extended south into Flatstate, possibly in about twenty years.

The first segment of the road scheduled for completion will be from the City of Green Lake north to a point east of Otter Lake at a cost of approximately $2 million.

The project would be eligible for federal funds but the amount available is not now known. There is not enough money available for all the projects that are eligible statewide, Head said.

Highway officials recommend that Highway 17 from Green Lake north to the county line be reconstructed along the route shown by a solid line (alternate B). It would follow existing Highway 17 to the Shortline railroad tracks, where the present highway swings west before continuing north along the east shore of Otter Lake.

The Department of Transportation has scheduled a public hearing concerning proposed corridors for the new road. This is the first of two hearings the department must hold. The other will consider the design of the highway and the right of way widths.

The hearing will be held in room G47 in the County snowplow garage at 10:00 a.m. The hearing map, being prepared, will be on display and engineers will be present to answer questions from 8:00 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. that day.
Information on the proposed corridors, including general right-of-way aspects, maps, sketches and studies made by the Department of Transportation District Office can be found in the lower drawer of a file cabinet in a back room of the snowplow garage behind a door marked “Danger – Leopards.”

Relocation advisory assistance is available to persons who may be displaced by later construction when the specific location for the highway is established.

In cases where people are forced to move in eminent domain proceedings, the state must pay for moving their belongings to another site on their property or to another location. The highway department also will assist the dislocated person in locating another home or apartment.

200 HEAR NEW PLAN FOR ‘17

“State Highway 17 has become inadequate and because of this we believe that the needs of the local people will best be served the construction of a new highway.” Those were the words of C. M. Head, District Engineer for the State Department of Transportation during last week’s Project 17 meeting at Sheepshead High School, where more than 200 people attended last Wednesday’s meeting called by the Project 17 committee headed by Mrs. Paw Gropp of Otter Lake.

PANELISTS HEAR COMMENTS

On hand to answer questions were members of the state legislature, Regional Planning Commission and the State Department of Transportation. The meeting stressed communications and was called in an attempt to clear up much of the misinformation and rumors arising from the proposed Highway 17 relocation and development.

After brief introductory remarks by several of the panel members, the meeting was thrown open for questions. The first topic to be clarified was that they new Hwy. 17 would be an expressway, and not a freeway. Mr. W. R. Redhorse, Director of the Department of Transportation, said that, “At no time was it recommended that ‘17 become anything but a two-lane rural highway, possibly with four lanes between I-55 and Highway 46.” Head explained that the difference between an expressway and a freeway was that a freeway had multiple lanes and access at interchanges only. He said that an expressway has access at grade intersections with controlled access and with traffic entering the expressway through frontage roads.

The proposed relocation of Hwy. 17 will involve a ten mile stretch between I-55 and the north county line. The panel explained that plans are to install four lanes between I-55 and Highway 46. The new Hwy. 17 would cross 46 just west of the Hill Street
apartments and then bisect the Sheepshead High School and Vilter Farm properties. It would then join Hwy. S and rejoin the original road north of South Lake.

POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES

A question was asked concerning the possible alternatives to this proposed corridor. Head explained that four plans had been considered, one which would keep the highway where it is (Plan A) and develop it, a second (Plan B) crossing the Sheepshead and Vilter properties, and two other alternatives further east. In addition, the department also has data on a no-build alternative for comparative purposes.

Head said that the first thing they would do if they had to choose Alternative A would be to go into the Lake area and begin cutting down trees. Head said that he didn’t think that people would like that. When asked, “Why not push the road further to the east?” Head replied that this would not be very desirable and that it would add too much to the overall length and cost and that it would not serve the community for which it was being designed.

Head brought out that this particular stretch of Hwy. 17 was very hazardous and that there had been six fatalities and 115 injuries reported over the past three years. He said that this rate was unacceptable and that it was three times the state highway injury rate and six times the death rate on similar state highways. Big Power, Executive Director of the planning agency, said, “You people who live in the area will benefit most from the relocation of ‘17 and the improvement.” Head said that the present highway is lovely, but very dangerous.

EFFECT ON SHEEPSHEAD AND HALLOW

There was considerable discussion on how the relocated highway would affect the Sheepshead and Hallow schools. Head said that the new highway would come to within 780 feet of the Sheepshead high school and approximately 1600 feet of Hallow School. Head said, we don’t feel that the new Hwy. 17 will be particularly detrimental to the schools in the area.

A question was raised as to the speed on the new improved Hwy. 17 and Head replied that the speed would be designed to accommodate 70 mile an hour traffic, but that the actual limitations would be left up to the individual municipalities. It will then be up to the Sheepshead and Hallow school districts.

Mr. Peter Crabgrass asked how many homes would be affected by the new route. Route A, explained Head, would affect five homes and two businesses, while Route B would affect two homes and seven farms.

Dr. Paw Gropp asked, “Have you honestly given any consideration to other alternatives?” and Head responded, “Yes, we have.”
A question was raised as to whether there are plans to develop Hwy. 17 even further and to whether or not it would someday become a four lane highway. Head and Redhorse both agreed that this is a distinct possibility, but that now there are no plans that would involve a four lane highway in this area.

COST

Mr. Thomas Tight of Otter Lake asked how the new relocated highway would be paid for. Head said that the highway would be paid for with state gasoline taxes.

Those residents attending Wednesday’s meeting were told that the proposed corridor plan had not been approved by the County Board or the State Transportation Department as yet. Once approval is granted, Redhorse announced, they would then begin the design hearings.

ANOTHER HEARING SET

After two hours of the hearing, it was decided to recess the hearing for a few days. This occurred after several fights broke out in the parking lot during a break in the hearing. “We need to let everyone cool down and start over,” said Big Power after being called a “pompous sleazebug” by Malcom Vilter. He abruptly adjourned the meeting amid the cheers following Vilter’s testimony.