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Residents give input at Confluence Parkway meeting

By Bridget Mire
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One of the possible locations for a new bridge over the Wenatchee River in Wenatchee is between the pedestrian bridge on the Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail, at left, and the railroad bridge at right. A Canada goose flies from the bank on the north side of the river on Wednesday.

World photo/Don Seabrook

WENATCHEE — When Chuck and Jo Anne Cox moved to Wenatchee from Seattle seven years ago, they were amazed at the traffic congestion on North Wenatchee Avenue.

It may not be as bad as the big city, but they still wanted to learn more about the planned Confluence Parkway to help solve the problem.

“The more I thought about it, the more I realized, ‘Well, they can’t expand. They have the river on one side and the hills on the other,’” Chuck Cox said. “In the area up around Maiden Lane, if you’re northbound and you want to turn left onto Maiden Lane and people southbound want to turn left into the Wendy’s, it’s a nightmare. I’m really interested in hearing the ideas they’re proposing. I think something like this is definitely needed.”

The couple and many others filled a room at the Confluence Technology Center for a Thursday meeting featuring updates on the project, which would be a bypass to North Wenatchee Avenue and create another bridge across the Wenatchee River.

“We are aware of the traffic problems on Wenatchee Avenue, but also we enjoy the trail and the natural area, so we want to see how it’s all going to work together to preserve that,” Jo Anne Cox said.

Confluence Parkway would be a \$126 million piece of the proposed \$254 million Apple Capital Loop project. Wenatchee is requesting \$122 million from a federal grant.

The city has hired KPG Engineering and Anchor QEA to work on a required analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act. The process is expected to last through 2021.

City encourages feedback

For more information on the project, visit [wenatcheewa.gov/confluenceparkway](https://www.wenatcheewa.gov/confluenceparkway). Send comments or questions to cpnepa@wenatcheewa.gov.

The environmental analysis will look at potential impacts to the Horan Natural Area, Wenatchee Confluence State Park, Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail, natural resources such as wildlife and plants, and cultural resources related to Native Americans. Thursday’s meeting included an open house with different stations related to those factors, followed by a presentation by city officials.

Confluence Parkway would provide direct connection to the Highway 97A/Highway 2 interchange and Odabashian Bridge.

Wenatchee Economic Development Director Steve King described the proposed route:

“We stay on Hawley Street and then we go along the railroad tracks where the loop trail is now, move the loop trail over into the natural area, cross the river right next to the railroad bridge, and then we’re proposing to go behind the McDougall property and along the railroad tracks and then out to 97/A.”

The city is also looking at creating a berm to block the road from the trail and natural area.

Currently a pedestrian bridge, railroad bridge and two highway bridges cross the Wenatchee River in that area. A new bridge for traffic could possibly be combined with the pedestrian bridge. People would then walk under the new bridge.

The city had considered several other options, including another bridge over the Columbia River. However, King said analyses showed that would not fix the traffic problems on North Wenatchee Avenue and the 2011 North Wenatchee Transportation Master Plan identified Confluence Parkway as the preferred solution.

“One of the biggest things is we know that most of the growth and most of the new housing units are going to be in the Douglas County, East Wenatchee area and that puts exceedingly more pressure on the Odabashian Bridge,” King said.

Pam Heidenfelder used to work in Cashmere and said traffic made it hard to get in and out of Wenatchee. Though the location of the proposed project wouldn’t have benefited her, she said it’ll still help with congestion.

“Every area that’s expanding has the same kind of issues that come up, and property owners have concerns and it’s emotional,” she said. “For me it isn’t an issue. I have no emotional attachments to their plan other than that I think it’d be helpful for traffic.”

Heidenfelder said she also uses the loop trail and wanted to learn how that would be moved.

Wenatchee resident Kasey Koski had several reasons for attending the meeting.

“I really enjoy paddling my kayak down there and appreciate the quiet natural area,” she said. “Just wanting to know what the changes are going to look like there. Definitely about protecting the Horan area and the Confluence waterway for the people that use it and enjoy it as it is,

especially protecting the new residents there — the moose and the eagle family. It's brought more traffic to the area, but the more traffic we have there, the less likely those new neighbors are to stay."

Koski is also an artist and said she was curious about potential opportunities to help with the aesthetic side of the new entryway into town. In addition, her job at the Wenatchee Valley Museum & Cultural Center has sparked interest in informing people about the historical, cultural and natural resources related to the Horan Natural Area.

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