

# Bypass could tame traffic

by Michele Mihalovich | [June 9, 2013, 4:13 p.m.](#)

Wenatchee

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WENATCHEE — In tackling the issues of how to improve safety, traffic flow and pedestrian and bike travel along North Wenatchee Avenue, it was the public that suggested bypassing the whole dang mess.

“We didn’t even present the concept at our open houses because of the expense and other issues,” said Jeff Wilkens, executive director of the Wenatchee Valley Transportation Council. “But it was the public and business owners along the corridor who asked us why we weren’t considering it.”

The “Confluence Parkway” bypass concept, estimated to cost between \$161 million and \$196 million, is one of three possible North Wenatchee Avenue improvement scenarios unveiled Thursday by Larry Toedtli of transpoGROUP, the consultant firm.

This concept would create a new, two-lane, arterial corridor that connects Miller Street in Wenatchee to the Olds Station Euclid Avenue interchange with Highway 2/97. It includes a second bridge over the Wenatchee River and straightening out the Highway 2/97 interchange.

Another concept, estimated to cost \$106 million to \$129 million, would include a median separating the current four lanes, combining business entrances, allowing U-turns and restricting left-hand turns. This plan also includes a redesign of Highway 2/97.

The third concept, between \$16 million and \$20 million, proposes minimal changes like improving Walnut and McKittrick streets to help with some of the congestion on Wenatchee Avenue.

Many at the meeting said they support the bypass plan despite the hefty price tag, including Wenatchee Mayor Dennis Johnson.

“I think the Parkway Confluence (bypass concept) truly addresses the long-term future plans of this area,” he said after the meeting. “The other two just offer short-term fixes.”

But figuring out how to pay for such an ambitious transportation project did come up at the meeting.

Rep. Mike Armstrong, the ranking Republican on the House Transportation Committee, told the group, “This is a great idea and I would love to find money to fund it. But in reality, there just isn’t any state or federal funding available right now.”

Wilkens did point out that the Highway 2/97 section of the project would more than likely be considered a project for the state Department of Transportation, essentially cutting about \$40 million from the overall project.

But he said the rest of the money would probably have to come from some sort of tax increase in the region, given the lack of federal and state monies available right now.

Wilkins said after the meeting that he would expect “that conversation” with voters to take place in four to five years.

Before that happens, he said, the WVTC board will vote for one of the three concepts.

Wilkins said he anticipates that to happen this summer, and he does plan to recommend the bypass concept to the board. He also said that even before the engineering and design phase takes place, and Environmental Impact Study would have to be completed.

“Those can take years,” Wilkins said. “It took five years for the widening of Sunset Highway to get approval. But I think this might only take a couple years.”

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