

Mason County Life

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Belfair Bypass Planning in sight

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The state can't start design on the Belfair Bypass until next year, but local agencies are ramping up projects that will impact Highway 3 north of Belfair.

The state Department of Transportation plans to revisit a 2010 report that identified four alternatives for the Belfair Bypass as the first step in the design process for the project, said WSDOT project engineer Michele Britton at a county meeting Jan. 30 in Belfair.

The Legislature set aside \$66.9 million for

the design and construction of the bypass project, but the funds don't become available until summer of 2019.

"This is not a project we're working on yet," Britton said. "As funding becomes available next year, we will pull it off the shelf at that time."

Preliminary design is scheduled for July 2019 to July 2022, right-of-way acquisition is slated for August 2020 to June 2022, and construction is planned for July 2022 through March 2025.

As soon as WSDOT finalizes design in one area, the agency will immediately begin the process to acquire the land that's needed for the

highway project, Britton said.

The state agency will also need to update the environmental assessment on file for the project, but that won't require a complete overhaul, Britton continued.

"There will be a lot of overlap with this schedule," she said. "It'll be here before you know it."

The alternatives that must be reassessed from the 2010 report include creating a two-lane (rather than a four-lane) highway; lowering the speed limit through the central core of the bypass; re-evaluating the configuration of the end connectors; and shortening the bypass route.

The bypass route at the moment clips through parts of the North Mason School District property, through a

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drainfield, baseball diamond and parking lot of the football stadium.

"That's something that we will have to look at because that is the biggest impact," Britton said. "That whole end needs to be looked at ... whether we're talking about a signal or roundabout for traffic interchange."

Meanwhile, Mason Transit Authority has already started design work on a park and ride that will be located near the Kitsap County line in Belfair, and Mason County wants to pursue additional funding to extend the Belfair sewer line to the Port of Bremerton.

If the state only secures enough right of way for a two-lane highway, that might not be enough for the proposed sewer extension, said Mason County Public Works Director Jerry Hauth.

"I think we're a little bit ahead of your schedule," he told Britton. The county received \$515,000 in the state's capital budget this year to fund

the extension of the sewer line. The county is committed to working with WSDOT through the process, Hauth said.

Mason Transit will also need to work with WSDOT through the duration of its project — the transit agency's consulting firm, SCJ Alliance, will present options for intersection control at the park and ride to WSDOT next month.

The public is invited to comment on the intersection options at an open house from 5:30 to 7 p.m., Wednesday, March 7, at the North Mason Timberland Library in Belfair. The options could include signals or roundabouts.

Mason Transit plans to open the park and ride next year.

"We definitely will need some intersection control especially for (vehicles) making a left turn onto Highway 3," said MTA general manager Dannelle Branin.

While some community members expressed disbelief that WSDOT would ever start the bypass project, county commissioner Randy Neatherlin expressed optimism.

"It's wonderful that it is coming," he said. "But everything takes time."