

Mason Transit plans for roundabout on highway

Arla Shephard Bull
Mason County Life

Although the state has yet to give its final say on what type of intersection will be built on Highway 3 entering Mason Transit Authority's future park and ride on Log Yard Road, all signs point to a roundabout.

Mason Transit Authority's consultant, SCJ Alliance, wraps up an intersection control analysis this month, as required by the Department of Transportation. The firm will recommend that the state build a roundabout rather than lights or stop signs at what will be a busy highway crossing.

Representatives from the firm briefed the public about its recommendation at a Mason Transit Authority meeting on Tuesday in Belfair. They were met with heated reactions, as community members shared concerns about truck traffic and an already congested downtown.

"Fifty cars (at the park and ride) are going to take precedence over the largest industrial park until Shelton," said Earl Giddings of Belfair. "This roundabout is not going to work. Shame on you. Shame on you."

In terms of safety and cost, a roundabout far out-

performs the other alternatives, said Patrick Holm, an engineer with SCJ Alliance.

While a roundabout would cost slightly more to build than two-way stop control or a traffic signal, the cost to maintain the roundabout would be minimal compared with a traffic light, he said.

Furthermore, collisions at roundabouts are less severe and consequently create less of a "societal" cost, in terms of emergency responders deployed and the time people lose when they're backed up on the highway after a collision occurs, Holm continued.

The societal cost of two-way stop control at the future intersection would be about \$11.5 million by 2025, compared with about \$3 million for a traffic light intersection and \$1 million for a roundabout, according to SCJ Alliance's charts.

"That is an astronomical cost compared to the other two," Holm said. "The recommendation we're recommending is the roundabout option because it's the safest and least costly."

Out of the more than 300 roundabouts in the state, 30 to 50 are on state highways, about 20 of those are on highways with speeds greater than 55 mph and 10 of those also see the amount of freight traffic that Belfair sees on Highway 3.

The roundabout would be built during off-peak hours and will be constructed closer to the east side of the highway, cutting into Mason Transit Authority's park and ride property instead of the properties on the west side with existing businesses.

Mason Transit Authority spoke with business and property owners at the proposed intersection, who said they would support a roundabout as long as it was built large enough to accommodate the largest freight trucks that their businesses use, said MTA manager Dannette Brannin.

Joseph Perez, a traffic design engineer for the Department of Transportation, assured community members that any roundabout would be built to accommodate those large trucks.

"The roundabouts we see today are truck-friendly," Perez said. "The roundabouts of five, six years ago were kind of a mistake. We've learned curb tail."

Community members worried about how a roundabout would affect an already congested highway during peak hours and implored Mason Transit to wait until the Belfair Bypass was built so that the project could align with the bypass.

"You're premature in making any decision," said

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Herb Gerhardt of Belfair. "Pick the simplest and cheapest option, the signal."

Other community members, like local business owner Brian Petersen, pointed out that when Belfair is congested, it doesn't matter whether or not there's a roundabout.

"In non-congestion, (roundabouts) keep traffic moving," he said. "It's safer

and it's a better intersection than a light ... in congestion, you're already backed up to the airport. Does it matter if you're sitting there in a straight line or in a semi-circle?"

The state will give its final approval to Mason Transit's plans by the end of June. Mason Transit Authority plans to build a 100-stall park and ride in the summer of 2019.