

Willow Pass median plans in Bay Point sent packing

By Paul Bugarino
East County Times

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Contra Costa County has scrapped plans to place concrete medians on Bay Point's busiest street after overwhelming community criticism of the idea.

After community members spoke out against adding barriers on Willow Pass Road between Manor Drive and Bailey Road at an April meeting, county planners decided to explore alternatives to improve safety on the road.

"There was a lot of opposition from residents about the impact (the medians) would have on businesses and the community, so we decided to take another snapshot of it," county Supervisor Federal Glover said.

County planners will bring forward alternatives at a June 4 meeting — hopefully with the same emphasis on safety without the hardships "the community felt they were going to endure," Glover said.

Among the alternatives that may be considered:

Changing the right lane of eastbound Willow Pass Road at Bailey Road to allow two lanes of through traffic — with the right lane being a shared through/right turn lane

Moving the merge from two lanes to one on Willow Pass Road farther east to N. Broadway Avenue

Removing on-street parking between N. Broadway Avenue and Solano Avenue

Other proposals include electronic speed limit signs, more visible traffic signal lights, filling sidewalk gaps, and resurfacing the roadway.

Reports from the past eight years show a concentration of crashes between Clearland Drive and Bailey Road — most of which are broadside collisions caused by drivers going in and out of the middle two-way left turn lane, county officials said. Willow Pass accidents occur most frequently eastbound from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m., said Angela Villar, a county engineer.

There were 523 collisions on Willow Pass Road from January 2000 to December 2007, including 108 near Bailey, she said. Two of the collisions were fatal, including an October crash between a car and a school bus after the driver of the sedan drifted across lanes.

"The redraw still has to move forward with something that provides safety in these zones," Glover said. The median plan had some merits, Glover said, though he understood community concern.

Residents who panned the median idea at the meeting were pleased to hear it had been dropped.

Bill Bly, owner of Bill's Ranch Market, said medians have been a waste of money. There are better ways to increase Willow Pass safety, like illuminated crosswalks, better lighting along the corridor, and widening the road, he said.

Like many, Bly thought the medians were "going to be a headache" for customers and residents and emergency response in the community.

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Even without medians, the project is expected to cost \$600,000 to \$800,000, depending on design. About \$1 million has been set aside, with funding coming from state Prop. 1B, which voters approved in 2006.

Reach Paul Burgarino at 925-779-7164 or pburgarino@bayareanewsgroup.com.

IF YOU GO WHAT: Town Hall meeting on Willow Pass Road safety improvements WHERE: Ambrose Community Center, 3105 Willow Pass Road, Bay Point WHEN: 7 p.m. June 4 MORE INFORMATION: Call Angela Villar at the county Public Works Department at 925-313-2016 or visit the county Web site at www.co.contra-costa.ca.us

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