

Survey about need for second viaduct to be mailed to residents

Written by Elizabeth Barrett

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Local residents respond at public hearing.

Gothenburg residents will get a chance to voice their opinion about whether a second viaduct is needed.

A survey asking that question and whether or not Lake Avenue and Cottonwood Drive should be closed will be in customer utility bills to be mailed around Nov. 8.

Answers will be shared with the council and sent to Schemmer's for inclusion in the final report about the need for a second viaduct.

Schemmer, a Lincoln architectural, engineering and planning firm was hired to do a transportation and second-viaduct feasibility study last spring.

Schemmer officials presented a draft of the study during a 45-minute public hearing at the Oct. 19 meeting of the Gothenburg City Council.

Some community members who attended the hearing wondered why the council had commissioned and paid for a transportation and viaduct feasibility study before surveying residents.

During public comments, Lois Stanton asked if there was recourse for citizens if the council approved the study.

"Assuming that we can't afford it but the railroad wants it and gives money, should not the citizenry vote yes or no if we accept the closings (of railroad crossings) and funding," Stanton asked.

Schemmer manager of traffic engineering Mark Lutjeharms said the decision of whether to go ahead with the viaduct project was a city, not a railroad, decision.

When asked, Lutjeharms said citizens have voted on whether or not they want a viaduct in some communities.

Jeff Morris wondered why the study was done and if money was wasted without citizen input.

Lori Clymer suggested that perhaps resident surveys should have been completed before money was spent for a study she doesn't think is necessary.

Citizens were invited to a July 27 meeting where they could comment on the feasibility and location of a second viaduct.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said council members, who represent the community, vote on many things dealing with city government.

He also explained that the council budgeted \$60,000 for the \$69,715 study of which the Dawson County Railroad Transportation Safety District will pay \$50,000, raised through county property taxes.

The study will cost the city about \$19,715.

Clymer added that the Oct. 19 public hearing was to receive more input, noting that the council would take community views into consideration.

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Council member Jim Aden said he and other members were elected to use a crystal ball. "That's what we're doing now...this is an opportunity to cost share to see if a viaduct is something Gothenburg needs in the future," Aden said. "We're trying to get public comment."

He noted that the study showed 146 trains expected to barrel down the tracks each day by 2020 and 178 by 2030.

"If we don't start now, 10 years down the road we'll have issues and another 10-year wait," he explained. "We're moving forward slowly."

J Buddenberg asked if officials had looked into upgrading

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