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County may help pay for rework of Kellogg, I-235

By FRED MANN
The Wichita Eagle

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Sedgwick County commissioners will consider this week whether to help pay for improvements to the treacherous interchange at Kellogg and I-235 in west Wichita.

The city of Wichita has asked the county to provide \$11.6 million to help fund the first phase of improvements, 10 percent of the total \$116 million cost of the phase. The state would provide the other \$104.4 million.

The first phase of the Kellogg-I-235 project would eliminate two cramped cloverleaf loops that have caused traffic accidents over the years.

Commissioners began discussing the proposal at a staff meeting last week.

"You can make a case that that intersection is the one that's probably hated the most in Sedgwick County," William Buchanan, county manager, said at the meeting. "It would certainly seem to me to be a top priority for a governing organization to fix that as soon as possible."

The Kellogg-I-235 intersection, built in the mid-1950s, is the worst in Wichita for accidents.

From 2004 to 2008, there were 243 accidents involving 411 vehicles resulting in 79 injuries and one fatality at the location, according to the latest data from the Kansas Department of Transportation.

More than 130,000 vehicles pass through the intersection each day.

Commissioner Tim Norton said the intersection rose to the top of the list of priorities of major road projects ranked by the Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization after a year and a half of study.

"With the volume of traffic it carries and how important it is to the flow of traffic east, west, north and south in this area, that was the best place to centralize our money," he said.

KDOT is redesigning the interchange. Scott King, project manager for KDOT, said the first phase would include new flyovers linking southbound I-235 to eastbound Kellogg, and westbound Kellogg to northbound I-235.

That would eliminate the weaving movements drivers are forced to make using the existing tight loops, he said.

The entire KDOT project covers the I-235 corridor between Central and Kellogg. There hasn't been a schedule for the work, King said. Halfway through the design process, KDOT will review the design along the corridor. That could happen early next year, he said.

The county's funds could help give the Kellogg-I-235 interchange project some momentum, King said.

"We've said for all these projects we'd like partners to help us out," King said. "It's going to take that grassroots support to keep it moving."

"Anytime there's a local contribution, it helps stretch those state dollars farther," said Tom Hein, KDOT spokesman. "It certainly is encouraging that they're talking about it."

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In February, KDOT announced that work would begin on the first three major expansion projects to be funded by T-WORKS, the \$8.2 billion, 10-year transportation funding package approved by the Kansas Legislature last year. None of the three is in Sedgwick County.

A new list is due later this summer, according to KDOT.

Projects that make the list are given the green light, with schedules and funding established.

"I don't know whether that project would be in there," Hein said. "If it is, it would mean we'd start at least the first phase of this project."

The city of Wichita wouldn't participate in funding for that interchange. It has proposed providing a similar 10 percent match to continue extending Kellogg improvements through Webb Road and Greenwich Road on the east side.

Commissioner Jim Skelton said fixing the Kellogg-I-235 interchange is important for the entire region.

"If we were to put this on the back of the city alone, certainly it would take longer... and more people would get killed," he said.

David Spears, the county's public works director, cautioned that \$11.6 million represents an entire year's worth of sales tax money that the county spends on roads and bridges.

"That is a lot of money for Sedgwick County," he said.

Funding could come from cash, bonds, funds earmarked for other capital improvement projects that could be pushed back, or combinations of those sources, Buchanan said.



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