

Study: Roundabouts ease traffic By Michael Valkys
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Two new roundabouts along Raymond Avenue in Arlington near Vassar College have decreased delays and accidents in the corridor, a state study has found.

"The goal of the project, to reduce speeds and delays while encouraging a safer, more pedestrian-friendly corridor, has been met," the 17-page study concludes.

The positive report from the state Department of Transportation is another indication the agency plans to move forward with construction of a third roundabout next year at Collegeview/Fulton avenues. The DOT is preparing bid documents for that project and construction could begin next summer.

The total cost of the three roundabouts has been estimated at \$6 million.

William Gorton, regional design engineer with the DOT, said the report's findings mean the project will likely get the green light.

"The results are consistent with what our expectations were," Gorton said. "We really don't see anything that would prohibit us from moving forward."

The report has its skeptics.

Town of Poughkeepsie Supervisor Patricia Myers questioned the findings and remains concerned about potential negative effects the third roundabout might bring.

"I don't know how many of them will survive another season of construction," Myers said of businesses along Raymond that would be affected. She also listed potential problems with parking and delivery trucks as issues which must be addressed.

"I think those are major concerns," Myers said.

Gorton said work on the third roundabout would mostly occur in summer, when traffic is down and schools are not in session. The Arthur S. May Elementary School is along Raymond, not far from where construction will take place.

The DOT last year installed roundabouts at College Avenue and Vassar's main gate following years of debate about the project. Supporters say the devices have made the area safer and more attractive. Opponents claim they increase traffic on nearby residential streets.

The DOT pledged to perform the traffic study to measure the roundabouts' effect on the area before moving forward with construction of a third circle.

The DOT study relied on data compiled in May 2006, before the two roundabouts opened, and from about the same time last month.

Some findings include:

- Vehicular traffic along Raymond decreased 8.8 percent. Traffic on nearby Grand Avenue, where residents claim more vehicles travel since the roundabouts opened, increased 8.1 percent.

The study claims at least some of the increased traffic on Grand can be attributed to the installation of a traffic light at the intersection of Hooker Avenue and Wilbur Boulevard.

Myers was skeptical the increase on Grand is not directly related to the roundabouts.

"I find that hard to believe," she said.

Gorton said "obviously there are some people who have chosen to use Grand over Raymond," but that other factors also come into play. The DOT plans to install traffic-calming devices on Grand before Raymond work resumes, which the agency believes will reduce traffic on Grand.

Grand resident Stanley Israel said he has noticed less traffic on Raymond and more on his street. He thinks the increase is related to the new roundabouts, with more drivers using other routes.

"There's no question there is difficulty getting in and out of my driveway," Israel said.

- Traffic delays through the corridor decreased 56 percent since construction.
- Average vehicle speed through the area has decreased by 9 mph in each direction, or 24 percent. The study found the average northbound speed is now 28 mph. Southbound averaged 30 mph.
- Accidents decreased 51 percent, with 17 from December of last year through May. That compared to 35 accidents from May to December 2005, before construction began.

The DOT report concludes roundabouts have led to "a safer corridor for vehicles and pedestrians," and that the project "has met or exceeded the expected evaluation criteria for success."

The governing bodies of the town and neighboring City of Poughkeepsie formally opposed installation of the two roundabouts, but the DOT built them anyway. Raymond is a state road controlled by the DOT.

The state also plans to share the traffic study with city officials.

Myers acknowledged there may be little to prevent the third roundabout from being built, but that the town board must make the DOT aware of potential problems soon.

"I think we have to maintain that we need answers to these questions before they go to bid," Myers said.

The town board received the study Wednesday night and will likely discuss the DOT's plans at an upcoming meeting.

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