

# Villages confused by IDOT's new Willow Road plan

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The Illinois Department of Transportation has decided to go back to the drawing board on the plans to expand Willow Road, and village officials say they are having a hard time understanding why.

"People are very confused by this," said Stacy Sigman, Northfield's village manager, who said IDOT and Northfield had reached a decision in 2005 to expand the road to three lanes. "Why has the original plan been stopped?"

IDOT's decision earlier this month to go back to Phase I on the planning of Willow Road is the latest in a series of years-long delays and debates surrounding the road.

A decade ago, IDOT proposed an expansion of Willow Road to four lanes to increase commerce in the area. But Northfield pushed back, arguing that the expansion would endanger the children who go to school on Willow Road and would change the character of the village.

Villages west of Northfield, such as Glenview and Northbrook, were in favor of the four-lane road because leaders thought it would bring business to the area.

Northfield and IDOT finally agreed to a plan that would increase Willow Road to three lanes, but that plan was eventually delayed and abandoned in 2005.

Now, in the wake of new legislation mandating context-sensitive construction decisions, IDOT has announced a new Phase I study to determine what the best plan is.

"We need to go through a process, starting with defining transportation needs and then going onto alternatives," said Pete Harmet, chief of programming at IDOT. "This process is necessary to support whatever the recommendation is."

Harmet said that there should be no preconceived notions of what the study will conclude, but that the three-lane plan "did not speak to the congestion relief issues."

Sigman said otherwise, stating, "we think [having three lanes] solves a lot of the mobility and safety issues, while still maintaining the character of Northfield." Greene said that while the portion of Willow Road in Glenview is a commercial area, the road in Northfield has three schools, churches and residences.

Glenview, however, has always been in favor of a larger expansion.

"The board has taken a stand to see Willow Road widen to four lanes to the Edens Expressway," Glenview Village President Kerry Cummings said. "We feel that the two-lane configuration through Northfield creates an enormous bottleneck, and communities west of there...suffer because of it."

Regardless of what each side wants, both village leaders and their residents seem to be confused as to why the state is starting over-and why the budget has increased from \$5 million in 2005 to \$23 million this time around.

Northfield resident Julia Hauldren called the new price tag "fiscally irresponsible" and "outrageous."

Brian Kozminski, of Northfield, agreed.

"It seems like a waste, and it doesn't seem like the state would have this kind of money," said Kozminski, whose daughter attends Sunset Ridge School on Willow Road. "And if they do, why aren't they spending money on other things that are wanted?"

Although in favor of a four-lane road, Cummings is concerned about the delay, as well.

"I'm disappointed, because money has already been spent on a study to gather some of this information, and we're starting from square one again," she said.

Some residents don't even know where to get their information. Some state officials said they are planning to go forward with a four-lane plan, even as the Northfield President Fred Gougler assured residents that this was false.

"I am confused by...who decides what will happen in my town," Hauldren said. "Does the village president and manager speak for us, or does Schoenberg? And why, if they are both part of our government, are they saying different things will happen?"

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*Jessica Cantarelli contributed additional reporting for this story.*

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