



NEWS

From the Illinois Senate

State Senator Jeff Schoenberg

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Schoenberg: Four Lanes for Willow Road in Northfield

IDOT Secretary, Crate and Barrel CEO and Area Leaders Endorse Added Safety Measures and Increased Lanes Within Existing Right-of-Way

Northfield, IL- Breaking a forty-year impasse over questions of traffic safety and expanded capacity on Willow Road, State Senator Jeff Schoenberg (D-Evanston) today announced that the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) will initiate engineering studies toward constructing four lanes within the existing right-of-way on the 1.2 mile stretch of state roadway in the Village of Northfield.

At a press conference at the North Shore Senior Center in Northfield, Schoenberg credited the joint Context Sensitive Design study between citizen representatives of Northfield and Winnetka with providing North Shore residents an unprecedented level of public education and analysis of the various transportation options available for the state-owned roadway. The \$90,000 state-funded planning study of Willow Road from Waukegan Road in Northfield to Provident Avenue in Winnetka by the Chicago-based Lakota Group was initiated by Schoenberg in 2007 as a way to actively engage the communities of Winnetka and Northfield in a deliberate joint planning process reflecting the shared values of the neighboring suburbs.

"After independent studies clearly demonstrated inadequate traffic capacity and insufficient funding projections for the 1999 agreement between the Ryan Administration and the Village of Northfield, it was critical that we bring a fresh and balanced approach to this long-time stalemate," Schoenberg said. "Over these past several months, the Willow Road Enhancement Steering Committee has thoroughly examined how we can further enhance pedestrian and driver safety along this difficult stretch of state road, while providing area residents with the opportunity to weigh in on how we can also make it more attractive to pedestrians and bicyclists.

Schoenberg, chairman of a key Senate budget committee, also thanked IDOT Secretary Milton R. Sees, Deputy Director Diane O'Keefe and their staff at IDOT for enthusiastically agreeing that the Group's detailed findings will be incorporated within accelerated Phase I and Phase II engineering studies, for which approximately \$4.0 million in state funds have been earmarked.

He added that due to the paramount concern over pedestrian traffic from area school children seeking access to elementary schools and parks along Willow Road in Northfield, a portion of the earmarked engineering funds will be applied toward further study and design of a proposed underpass between Willow Park and Clarkson Park, as part of a comprehensive solution to the decades-old problem facing Willow Road.

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In addition to Secretary Sees, Schoenberg was joined by a group of business leaders, educators and local officials, including Crate and Barrel CEO Gordon Segal, Kohl Children's Museum President Sheridan Turner and local officials, including State Sen. Susan Garrett (D-Lake Forest), State Rep. Elaine Nekritz (D-Northbrook), Glenview Village President Kerry Cummings, Winnetka Village President Ed Woodbury and Northbrook Chamber of Commerce President Tensley Garris.

"On behalf of Gov. Blagojevich, I am pleased to announce that IDOT will be starting a temporary resurfacing project in the next few weeks that will greatly improve the safety of the riding surface on Willow Road," said IDOT Secretary Milton R. Sees. "In addition, IDOT will soon undertake an engineering study to propose permanent long-term improvements for Willow Road. As a starting point, we will rely heavily on the 'Context Sensitive Solutions' study that the villages of Northfield and Winnetka have nearly completed for Willow Road. Our goal will be to design a project that preserves the character of the community and that enhances safety for motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists, while at the same time addressing congestion."

"As a businessperson whose corporate headquarters are nearby and as a longtime resident of this area, I know all too well how important it is for us to have a reliable transportation system that can safely handle existing traffic and the increased traffic that is expected in this region in the future," said Crate and Barrel CEO Gordon Segal. "Inadequate roads disrupt daily commutes for our employees and customers and add unnecessary delays to shipping goods, which in the end costs all of us in both time and money. I am delighted that we can finally move forward in a positive manner that addresses the concerns of both residents and businesses, regarding Willow Road."

"On behalf of the Village of Glenview, I would like to thank Senator Jeff Schoenberg for his leadership in addressing regional traffic issues. The Village has long advocated for an expansion to four lanes along this stretch of Willow Road. We couldn't be more pleased with the outcome, which will decrease congestion and reduce cut-through traffic for Glenview and the surrounding communities," said Kerry Cummings, Glenview Village President.

"The widening of Willow Road is long-awaited and long-needed. The benefits are clear: less congestion, improved safety and a vital component to our local economies," added State Sen. Susan Garrett.

"This is one of the first examples of Context Sensitive Design in Illinois," said State Rep. Elaine Nekritz. "This project takes into account the needs and safety of all roadway users, including pedestrians and bicyclists. By working together, we can make sure everyone has the opportunity for input into the design of this new roadway."

"The members of the Northbrook Chamber are very encouraged that the first steps are being taken to widen Willow Road. We have been patiently waiting for years for this critical transportation artery to be improved to a point that it can adequately handle the current traffic levels, and have room for increased demand, as the communities of the North Shore continue to grow and prosper," said Tensley Garris, President of the Northbrook Chamber of Commerce.

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Schoenberg commended the volunteer members of the Willow Road Enhancement Steering Committee, led by former Winnetka School District 36 Board Chair Becky Hurley, for their thoughtful approach to the lengthy Context Sensitive Design process. "Because of the effective leadership of Chairman Hurley and the other members of the Steering Committee, the draft report by the Lakota Group indicates clear consensus on roughly 85 percent of the issues pertaining to how we can make Willow Road safer and more attractive to pedestrians and bicyclists. For the balance of the issues, someone needs to step forward and break the tie," Schoenberg said.

"Today we are moving forward and putting an end to the posturing and paradox, so that this important regional roadway can adequately serve the overwhelming majority of those traveling throughout the North Shore."

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