

NORTH SHORE JOURNAL

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Christine Mallory, Editor

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Highway 61 Two Harbors Project 2018

By Kitty Mayo

A meeting hosted by the Two Harbors Area Chamber last week brought together business owners along the Highway 61 corridor going through Two Harbors and the Minnesota Department of Transportation.

MnDOT representatives were on hand to explain the project slated to take place this summer, with expected timelines and what to expect.

All together, the three phases of the project are currently proposed to start in mid-May 2018 and continue through October 2018.

Replacing the three oldest traffic signals left in the northeastern MnDOT district is the biggest issue for the construction, though other roadwork will be completed at the same time. While the new stop lights will work in tandem, MnDOT says the realize they will not totally alleviate the congestion problem through town in the busiest summer months.

"This will help improve traffic flow, but there's not a lot we can do with such a narrow corridor without losing a lot of parking,"

said Derek Fredrickson, MnDOT project manager.

Bids from contractors are expected to be returned in about a month, and a specific contractor will be chosen. MnDOT plans to meet with business owners and the contractor at that point.

Janelle Jones, president of the THAC made it clear that keeping a positive attitude will be the best thing to do for all the businesses in Two Harbors.

"It's a bummer in some ways, but it's going to be great when it's done. We are not sending the message that Two Harbors is closed, we can look at the positive and be creative in how we are going to deal with this," said Jones.

Jones also urged MnDOT to push the contractor that is chosen to start earlier than the proposed dates, even if it meant having temporary signals throughout the season.

The project has three sections to it, with separate, though sometimes overlapping, timelines.

First to begin will be "rural work" starting just at the edge of town and extending to Silver Creek tunnel. Scheduled from mid-May through October, at least a single lane of traffic in each direction will be maintained for the duration. Drivers should anticipate flagging operation or temporary signals at work locations, which will include the construction of an entrance off of 61 directly into the campground.

8th Street to 5th Street is scheduled to be worked on from July through mid-August. Side streets and entrances will be closed at times, and at least a single lane of traffic will be maintained on Highway 61. Parking will be very limited, and at times possibly not available. Some pipe work in the center of the road will necessitate closing down to one lane during one Monday through Thursday stretch.

4th Street (County Road 2) Intersection will be the final piece, running from mid-August through October. Again, side streets and entrances will be closed at times, but at least a single lane of traffic will be maintained on 61 and the north

leg of 4th Street at all times.

Fredrickson said that keeping communication open with business owners is a top priority. "We don't want to make it seem like it's going to be easy on your businesses, but we do want to help you work around this any way we can, and to do that you have to speak up and let us know what's going on," Fredrickson stated.

Mayor of Two Harbors, Chris Swanson, says that the city's working relationship with MnDOT is strong, and that they have been very responsive partners on the project thus far.

"We are happy MnDOT is working closely with us, and this is going to cause a slow down, but we are taking all the steps we can to lessen the impact for everyone in town," said Swanson.

Construction is expected to occur six days a week, Monday through Saturday, from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm. On holiday weekends work will end by noon of that Friday. Working around the clock is not an option, given the residential nature of the area.

Four-wheel Trail Proposed Crossing Northern Minnesota

By Kitty Mayo

A Border to Border Touring route is being proposed to run across northern Minnesota, and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is seeking input from the public.

Like a back country scenic byway for highway licensed vehicles, the B2B route would follow natural surface and gravel roads already in existence. What would change would be the addition of signage guiding four-wheelers along the path, which is still in the draft stage. However, proposed maps of the trail for each county are available online.

Once a route is decided upon, the DNR plans to put up wayfinding signs. The DNR has hired the National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council to plan and manage the route, and is working cooperatively with the help of Minnesota 4-Wheel Drives Association (M4WDA).

M4WDA is an advocacy group and association of Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) clubs throughout the state. One of their current legislative priorities is to

eliminate ORV prohibitions currently standing in their way in Cass, Crow Wing and Hubbard counties, though they continue to move forward with projects (the B2B route does not cross these three counties). B2B would traverse: Kittson, Marshall, Polk, Pennington, Red Lake, Clearwater, Beltrami, Itasca, St. Louis, Lake and Cook counties.

Calling it an "adventure trail", when completed it will be around 450 miles stretching from the North Dakota border all the way through the state to around Grand Portage in Cook county. Much of the "off-roading" type of driving will be on minimum maintenance logging roads where tall grass between the muddy wheel ruts is what the 4-wheeling set considers a good time.

Proponents of the trail say they believe it will bring economic benefits in terms of spending on gas, lodging and food for local



businesses along the way. Opponents of the route say they are concerned that road maintenance and crises in remote areas will tax their thin budgets, and that wilderness areas may be negatively impacted.

It's not too late to weigh in with your input, or get answers to questions you may have. "Listening sessions" are still being held in March: March 5th at Newfolden, Minn., March 6th at Hallock, Minn., and March 7th in Red Lake Falls, Minn.

The DNR is also accepting written comments on the touring

route proposal through March 25th. Emails will be accepted at: mary.straka@state.mn.us, or by snail mail to: Mary Straka, Minnesota DNR, Parks and Trails Division, 500 Lafayette Road, St. Paul, MN 55155. Straka is the DNR's Off Highway Vehicle program consultant.

For more information, or to get a copy of the proposal call: (218)203-4445. The plan with a map can also be viewed at the DNR website at: [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/ohv/plans/border to border trail.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/mgmtplans/ohv/plans/border%20to%20border%20trail.html).