

8 July 2009

Comments on Mineral Point/ Junction Road Intersection:

I have previously sent numerous comments concerning the plans for this intersection and some of the points below may be repetitive of those comments but are still deserving of attention.

1) I continue to be astounded as to why the City is planning roundabouts at the Mineral Point/ Pleasant View intersection and at the Junction/Valley View intersection. I was recently amazed when I was returning from Verona about 5:30 PM on a Friday evening when I encountered cars backed up to the north of the intersection of PD & M all the way back to Midtown Road, a distance of one mile! I also noticed that there are now signs up for no *right* turns onto side streets from 7-9 AM between PD & Midtown roads for southbound traffic on M. I must assume that a similar backup arises during morning rush hour and drivers are cutting through a residential neighborhood to get over to High Point Road.

At the present time traffic on Junction Road (Highway M) in front of my house ¼ mile south of the Mineral Point intersection does not back up in either direction for anything like a mile. Even during the busiest times it is moving, albeit slowly at times. I clearly foresee, however that the roundabout at the Junction/Valley View intersection will act as a turnstile with traffic from Junction Road heading south having to traverse ¾ of the roundabout in order to proceed to Verona. This will probably have the same effect as putting up a stop sign or speed bump for this traffic since it will have to slow dramatically to get through the roundabout. This will shift the mile-long backups during the evening rush hour that now occur further south on M to easily reach back to the Junction/ Mineral Point intersection. This raises the question of why that intersection is being given such a high visibility and priority by the City. It will only feed more traffic during the evening into the turnstile backup. Added lanes will only serve as additional parking lot space. The positive here is that it will probably take the pressure off of the PD & M intersection!

Likewise, during the morning rush hour a lot of frustrated drivers heading south on M are going to take a right at Midtown Road to get to High Point Road if traffic backs up to the south of the turnstile. This may be less of a problem since in this direction vehicles only need to traverse ¼ of the roundabout and may be able to maintain some speed.

2) I am equally amazed that the City is continuing to plan only a two-lane connector between Pleasant View and Valley View. Emergency vehicles from Middleton Fire & Dane County Sheriff (and City Police as the City moves west) will use this cutoff frequently! They currently come from the west on Mineral Point Road and then turn right on Junction Road but they will not want to go that far once the connector is in place. Having long traffic backups at the two roundabout turnstiles is going to be a significant public safety hazard without compounding the problem by designing two-lane roads. This connector was envisioned for four lanes over twenty years ago! The four lanes will be needed now. They should be a part of a continuous four-lane roadway for County Trunk M between Verona and Middleton via Pleasant View Road. The plans for this roadway go back many years and it is long overdue. With this roadway much of the congestion at the Mineral Point/ Junction intersection will be removed.

3) It is puzzling that the Mineral Point/ Junction Road intersection is being given such a high priority when intersections at Gammon and Mineral Point, at Gammon and Watts, and at PD and M have congestion and safety problems more severe than those at Mineral Point and Junction. I drive in this area at all hours of the day since I reside here and find that the Mineral Point/Junction Road intersection is not one that I try to avoid. It is clear that improvements could be made but an incremental approach could save a lot of unnecessary cost. Completing the four-lane roadway between Verona and Middleton first would provide an opportunity to put off (and perhaps eliminate) the need for the extremely costly bridge design.

4) We have been told that the Mineral Point/Junction intersection is being designed to serve "business interests". We must assume that statement refers to the proposed University Research Park. As a neighbor of the University Farm I am aware that the Research Park was announced in 2002 and that it was supposed to be started in 2004 yet there is still nothing to it but drawings (including some which show the University planning to put their buildings on property they do not own and have made no effort to acquire). It isn't shovel ready because the University still has this huge obstacle in the form of a TV tower that it doesn't seem to be able to get rid of! Why is the City putting such a high priority on this intersection to serve the University and asking its neighbors and residents to sacrifice their homes and farms when the University has failed to move ahead in even a rudimentary way to eliminate its TV tower and begin construction of some Research Park facilities. The University's promises have been hollow and their prospects for rapid development in the current economy don't seem very good.

5) The City of Madison and the Town of Middleton reached an agreement in 2003 concerning annexation of property in the Town of Middleton by the City of Madison. The clear intent of that agreement was to allow property owners in the Town to decline annexation into the City until 2042. That agreement was made after it was clear that a Research Park was proposed by the University so the City had every opportunity at that time to address any special needs for annexation of properties before signing that agreement. The City has been, at best, remiss in its planning if it has failed to recognize its contractual obligations under that agreement. As a Town of Middleton resident for nearly 25 years I, for one, have no desire to be annexed into a City which has so little regard for the individual rights of its residents or neighbors. We have been told that the design of this intersection has made no attempt to minimize the effect on private property owners, only on businesses and the cemetery. We have also been told that this is an experimental design.

6) In reviewing past planning efforts for the area I find that the City had originally planned to connect Junction Road to Pleasant View Road with an east-west street about halfway between Mineral Point Road and Old Sauk Road. Having another way in and out for shoppers would certainly help to reduce the traffic at the intersections of Junction/Mineral Point and Junction/Old Sauk. When does the City plan to put this connector in?

7) It has been my contention from the start of this process that the City and County should be doing everything they can to provide a corridor for Highway M traffic to the west of the existing intersection, most likely via Pleasant View Road where plans had been in place for over 25 years to reroute County M. The intersection of Junction and Mineral Point Roads is too close to the Beltline/Mineral Point and Commerce Drive/Mineral Point intersections to ever work efficiently. From the earliest rumors until the present, I have seen no attempt to look at the costs and benefits of a more incremental approach where County M is rerouted before a very expensive bridge is built at the Junction/Mineral Point intersection. I know that the simple addition of a second lane on Junction Road in front of the West Side Club to replace the hour-glass design has made an immense difference. Having two left-turn lanes for southbound traffic on Junction Road; two left-turn lanes for westbound Mineral Point Road traffic; adding another southbound lane on Junction Road between Mineral Point Road & Watts Road; and upgrading the traffic signal would work wonders and shouldn't require the expensive displacement of Steve's Liquors or the other private landowners.

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