

Bill Would Help Fund Ridge Avenue Work

BY BOB SEIDENBERG - Evanston Review

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A transportation bill now in front of Congress could provide funding the city needs to move forward on the long-stalled signal improvement and road repair project planned for Ridge Avenue.

City officials have sought a jurisdictional transfer on the route, bringing it under city control, "but we don't want to take the jurisdiction until we get the money to fix it," said David Jennings, the city's Public Works director.

Officials have been in discussion with state officials for two years over terms of the street's transfer.

Residents along Ridge had pushed for a change after a state plan to repair Ridge included a mandate that modern mast-arm signals be installed at the street's intersections as part of a \$1.86 million project.

Residents fought to retain the smaller post-arm signals now in use, arguing that they fit better into the essence of the street, which runs through a historic district.

U.S. Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-9th, who lives along Ridge, joined residents in their fight, and helped arrange discussions at both the state and federal levels to bring about the jurisdictional

transfer.

Schakowsky is a strong advocate of the transportation bill, which would provide \$3 million in funding toward the Ridge project. (See accompanying story). She is continuing her efforts, said Nadeam Elshami, her spokesman in Washington.

"We are going to be meeting with the (state) secretary of transportation to discuss this issue," he said Monday, "and in the meantime, we will continue to monitor the situation very closely and hope that Congress passes the final bill which includes the \$3 million."

The repairs would include a resurfacing of the street, another condition pushed by residents.

Officials are currently using asphalt patches and other means to repair potholes and other poor conditions along Ridge, one of the main north-south routes in and out of the city. Jennings agreed that the street is in "rough condition."

Other signal projects

Staff announced other traffic signal projects to be done in 2004 in a recent update they provided city council members.

Projects planned or at an early stage include Isabella/Sheridan/Ridge (\$250,000 construction cost); Central/Ridge and Girard/Central (\$300,000). Evanston Hospital is picking up the cost of the work on Central as part of their parking garage project.

Projects also include traffic signal improvements at Main/Sheridan (\$125,000). Officials say the existing signals are deteriorated and in need of replacement; along the Chicago Avenue corridor (\$1.4 million - to be funded half by the federal government; Central/Crawford/Gross Point (\$600,000); and Main/Dodge and Dodge/Church (\$125,000).

In several of the projects, members of the city's Preservation Commission have joined Ridge residents in opposing the mast-arm design, feeling that the lights "are not sensitive to the character" of the historic districts in which they would be located, said Carlos Ruiz, the city's historic preservation coordinator.

City officials have proposed a "decorative" mast-arm design as an alternative and plan to ask City Council members to support the recommendation.