

THE Messenger

NEWS

Citizens voice concerns about P33 traffic

Though some safety signs were installed, officials and residents say more safety measures needed

By JESSE HELLING, Messenger staff writer

As Frontier Ethanol of Gowrie began full production in May 2006, Webster County road P33 became a major truck route, over which the plant's traffic is routed.

However, the road also passes directly in front of Prairie Valley Elementary School in Callender and within blocks of Prairie Valley High School in Gowrie — bringing heavy semi traffic within school zones and posing a potential safety hazard, according to some concerned citizens.

Jim Dick, superintendent of the Prairie Valley school district, voiced such concerns Tuesday during a meeting of the Webster County Board of Supervisors.

Dick called for a combination of “all our minds” — supervisors, school district officials and representatives of Frontier — to come up with a solution that keeps the plant operating and keeps students safer.

“Is it viable to route (truck traffic) another way? Is it viable to say grain hauling traffic doesn't happen at certain times?” said Dick. “I know there's got to be an achievable solution.”

A major problem, said Dick, is that the large number of trucks can impede visibility of school buses.

Cars that attempt to pass semis often do not see a stopped school bus, from which exiting children crossing the road could be struck, he said.

“My big fear is that at some point, something is going to happen to one of the kids,” he said.

Dick said that he has discussed the possibility of slowing truck traffic during school bus travel hours in the morning and afternoon,” he said.

Additionally, many students at Prairie Valley Elementary School in Callender cross P33 on their way to and from school, Dick said.



Messenger photo by Jesse Helling

Signs warning motorists of a school bus stop were recently erected by Webster County near Frontier Ethanol on Webster County Road P33. This road, the main truck route for the plant, also runs near Prairie Valley Elementary School in Callender and Prairie Valley High School in Gowrie, and heavy semi traffic poses a potential safety risk to children, according to residents of the area and school officials.

To improve safety, crosswalks were recently painted over the road, but have worn off due to heavy traffic, according to Dick.

“The city of Callender has agreed to put up a flashing school crossing light,” he said. A teaching associate works to help students cross the street before and after school as well, Dick said.

Dick thanked the county for efforts made to improve safety thus far, which include erecting “School Bus Stop Ahead” signs near the corner of P33 and 320th Street — the latter of which runs directly to Frontier.

“This is a step in the right direction,” he said.

As a longer-term goal, Dick called for an alteration of the truck route.

For Ina Breeden, of Gowrie, the logical solution would be to reconstruct 320th Street, which is currently gravel-surfaced, east to U.S. Highway 169 to serve as the main route into the plant.

Breeden called on the supervisors to work toward that goal Tuesday.

“Someone is going to be killed,” she said. “I don’t want that to happen.”

In addition to school safety concerns, the dramatic increase in truck traffic has added to the noise and fumes directly affecting residents of Gowrie’s west side, Breeden said.

She encouraged the supervisors to lobby state legislators for funds to build the new road — which, in her opinion, said Breeden, would cost less in the long run due to less wear and tear on other county roads.

Any reconstruction of 320th Street would cost millions — money the county would be hard-pressed to raise, according to the the supervisors.

Supervisor Kim Motl advised Breeden to write to area legislators in support of the Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century proposal.

Suggested by the Iowa Department of Transportation late in 2006, the proposal calls for a variety of fee increases that would enable an additional \$200 million in road spending — 20 percent of which, said Motl, would go to the various Iowa counties, potentially providing more revenue for such construction projects.

“It will take every voice in Webster County to come behind it,” said Motl, adding that the board of supervisors has already endorsed the TIME-21 proposal. “Legislators need to hear from everyone.”

Contact Jesse Helling at (515) 573-2141 or jhelling@messengernews.net

Section: News Posted: 4/18/2007

THE
Messenger
713 Central Ave.
Fort Dodge, IA 50501
515-573-2141

Copyright 2007— The Messenger