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## **I-355 extension bike path, noise walls plan presented**

**By Maureen Wilkey**

Correspondent

With plans to open the North-South Tollway southern extension by the winter of 2007 under way, Lemont officials are considering what actions to take to build bike paths near the new highway as well as to make it less noisy and more aesthetically pleasing.

Representatives from the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority made a presentation to the Village Board at its June 20 Committee of the Whole meeting to present their suggestions to the village to best accomplish these goals.

"Having a bike path along the highway could be a huge opportunity for Lemont tourism," said Rocco Zuccherro, senior environmental planner for the tollway. "It could be a really great way for people to get into downtown."

The proposed bike path would be in the right of way of the new section of tollway and would connect to the current Centennial bike path to make a continuous loop that could be up to 90 miles, Zuccherro said. It would include a low level bridge across the Des Plaines River.

Mayor John Piazza agreed with Zuccherro, saying that it would be a valuable asset to the village.

While the village would have to pay for much of the cost of the bike path, the tollway would do the grading and clearing and pay for 30 percent of the design plan, Village Administrator Gary Holmes said.

"They're offering to help out with the part running from 135th to 127th streets, but we'd like to see a path that follows the tollway and crosses 127th, then goes by the school and Park District and into downtown," Holmes said.

Another issue the board will have to consider is the cost of building sound walls or natural berms to reduce the noise levels to homes in the subdivisions adjacent to the tollway extension.

The tollway will build sound walls only near subdivisions that were platted before 1999, according to tollway ordinances.

The authority is conducting a noise analysis to determine the level of increased noise the highway might cause.

"We need to make a complete analysis of what will happen, and find out what the worst-case scenario will be," Zuccherro said.

Sound walls would cost about \$1 million per mile to build, and would probably be made out of limestone to reflect some of the other structures in the area. Another option would be to construct natural berms, landscaped hills of

soil, which village and tollway officials agreed might be easier to maintain.

"Cost is definitely a factor," Piazza said. "And a berm, according to Rocco (Zucchero), would be better than a sound wall because it wouldn't reverberate. But there are a lot of properties that we might have to build very close to, so we'd have to look into that."

The aesthetics of the new road are being discussed at the committee level by the Local Advisory Committee, a group of residents from the towns that will be affected by the extension. The committee has so far discussed possible landscaping, artwork for walls and bridges, and materials or motifs for these projects. The members also have established the need to identify sources of funding to help the highway appear appealing.

While the costs of building the extension may be high for the village, Piazza said bringing I-355 to Lemont will help the town overall.

"It will move a lot of traffic off of our local roads," Piazza said. "This will help make us more of a destination spot, and that will be good for local businesses."

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