



## Quentin widening plan moves ahead amid hot debate

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It's still years away -- if it happens at all -- but a proposed widening of Quentin Road from Lake-Cook Road to Dundee Road already has invoked a fierce battle at the Cook County Forest Preserve board.

It promises to get only louder.

The forest preserve board narrowly voted earlier this month to accept a federal report, known as an 4-f report, which clears the way for the county highway department to apply for federal funds to study and plan the widening of that stretch from two lanes to four.

Quentin Road is already four lanes or more north and south of the stretch, and proponents say the move would eliminate a major traffic bottleneck in the area.

Opponents point out the stretch of road passes right down the center of the county's oldest forest preserve, Deer Grove, and widening the road would mean cutting down hundreds of trees, reducing forest preserve acreage and possibly increasing the number of animals killed on the road there.

The proposal also faced some heat from county commissioners, who also serve as forest preserve commissioners, because they thought the highway department had kept them in the dark and misdirected them about the urgency of the June 4 vote.

"I don't know how you have gotten to the point that you are now" without getting our prior approval, Commissioner Earlean Collins said. "That bothers me."

And while the report was accepted by a seemingly healthy margin of nine votes to six, with one commissioner abstaining and another absent, the number may have overstated commissioners' support for the project.

Although Collins, a Chicago Democrat, is a frequent administration critic, she was not the only one with some problems with the project.

Commissioner John Daley, normally an administration stalwart, was upset with staff members who initially suggested that if the board didn't approve the report, it would jeopardize federal funding for the badly needed reconstruction of the Quentin Road bridge over Salt Creek.

That fell apart, however, when Commissioner Peter Silvestri, an Elmwood Park Republican, grilled Ed Georges of the highway department about whether the two were really linked.

"If the road is never built, the bridge will still be built?" pressed Silvestri.

Georges admitted it would be.

That "really bothers me," said a clearly angered Daley. "It was my understanding that if we don't approve this, that the project, the bridge, will not be done."

Daley, like others, approved the report so that the county can further investigate the widening and get answers to questions about the project, but he made clear that he would not approve the project in its

current form, which would cull 7.75 acres and about 775 trees from the forest preserve.

If Daley, a bellwether of the board, remains opposed, the project could ultimately face trouble.

However, all three Republican commissioners with constituents in or near the area -- Gregg Goslin, Tim Schneider and Elizabeth Gorman -- voted to accept the report. They stressed the move was, for now, just an attempt to get answers, and they are withholding judgment on the possible widening.

But effectively, the approval allows the highway department to now apply for federal funds for the project.

Critics, including the Friends of the Forest Preserve, say that just gathers steam for eventual approval. They maintained the 4-f report was rushed and inaccurate, and that commissioners should have sent the highway department back to do its homework correctly.

For instance, the report concludes there are no endangered species in the area.

But Pete Jackson, an Arlington Heights resident and a Deer Grove Forest Preserve volunteer steward, said the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' own internal natural areas inventory lists the site as home to the Blandings Turtle, a state endangered species.

The preserve is already up for consideration as an Illinois Nature Preserve, the highest state protection for a natural area, he said. If approved, none of the forest preserve could be taken for the construction of roads, he noted.

Douglas Chen of the Sierra Club, which opposes the project, encouraged commissioners to consider expanding Ela Road to the west of the preserve, or Hicks Road to the east.

That, said Georges of the highway department, ignores the reality of Quentin Road already being an urban thoroughfare, whether people admit it or not.

Despite the designed capacity of 16,000 cars per day, the road already sees 21,000 cars per day now, he said. In the coming years, that will rise to 28,000, he said.

"If you build it, they will come," retorted Commissioner Mike Quigley, a Chicago Democrat who grew up in Carol Stream.

Studies consistently show that building roads doesn't alleviate traffic, it only makes it worse, he said.

But for the thousands who grind to a near-halt in that bottleneck stretch of road now, the project looks pretty attractive.

Taking the land to widen the road represents a loss of just four-tenths of 1 percent of the preserve's 1,730 acres, they point out. Environmentalists say the impact will be much bigger, with increased salt use on the road affecting wetlands and planned curbs prohibiting the migration patterns of the Blandings Turtle.

Proponents say the project can design underground pipe crossings for wildlife.

Locally, feelings are mixed.

The Palatine Chamber of Commerce had no official position.

The Lake Zurich Chamber of Commerce, which serves Deer Park to the north, supports it.

"When it comes to business and commerce and traffic flow ... it's something that should have been done 10 years ago," said Dale Perrin of the chamber. But he recognized that those who live along the road may feel differently.

"I think it's a great idea," said Palatine Councilman Mike Jezierski, whose district covers the affected area.

There's no deceleration lane for residents of a subdivision on the east side of Quentin Road at Lake-Cook Road, he noted. And when it's rush hour, no traffic controls to help people getting onto Quentin Road.

"They're on their own. You're taking your life in your own hands," he said.

Widening the road, he said, could have the potential to encourage those to the north to use the Metra train station south of the preserve at Smith and Colfax, about a half mile east of Quentin Road.

"You're not going to be adding or subtracting any more or less traffic ... it's a matter of how long are you going to make traffic sit," Jezierski said.

Sharon Krok, a resident of Hillcrest Road in the subdivision at Quentin and Lake-Cook Road, doesn't see it that way. Congestion is just a fact of life that people should learn to deal with.

"There's always going to be traffic. You widen the streets, more people are going to take it," she said. "It allows more traffic, more dead animals."

"I'm absolutely opposed because they're going to have to take down the forest," she concluded.

Ted Pacocha, another Hillcrest Road resident, felt differently.

"I think it's a necessary thing because it is a bottleneck there," he said.

He noted that the subdivision used to have a pipe that ran under Quentin Road into the preserve to help ease flooding. But after a repaving of the road some years ago, the pipe was damaged or removed and the subdivision began getting backups.

"We have pretty much a permanent babbling brook" in his culvert, he said.

He'd like to see that drainage restored along with any widening, he said.

Whatever the outcome, Commissioner Quigley said the issue is just one more example of the inherent conflict in having the county board also serve as the forest preserve board. He'd like to see the two divided.

Improving transportation is a priority of the county board, while maintaining and expanding forest preserves is the mission of the forest preserve board.

"You're forever asking yourself, 'What role am I playing today?' " Quigley said.