

Planning officials to air options for Route 7 corridor

By Martin B. Cassidy
Staff Writer

A shuttle bus route between Ridgefield, Branchville and Georgetown, some road widening in Wilton and focusing development near the Wilton train station and other transit hubs to maintain green space and increase mobility are some of ideas and strategies weighed in a proposed transportation and land use study on the Route 7 corridor.

Analyzing transportation options from Norwalk to Danbury, the plan doesn't examine the potential benefit or downsides of constructing a four-lane highway along Route 7, a polarizing concept that has been supported by some officials and residents who tout the economic benefits, but opposed by others in towns like Ridgefield and Wilton on the grounds of traffic and environmental effects.

"The focus was very much on a multi-modal study to find ways to balance automobile, buses and other forms of transit while looking at what we could achieve looking at the existing roadway," Southwestern Regional Planning Agency Senior Transportation Planner Craig Lader said.

Residents from Norwalk to Danbury will get a chance to offer opinions on a draft version of the study at an informational meeting from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday at Farmingville Elementary School, 324 Farmingville Road, Ridgefield.

The \$375,000 study is being conducted by the Southwestern Regional Planning Agency with input from the consulting firm of Fitzgerald & Halliday and cooperation from the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials, and the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

The study also includes an analysis of traffic volume and accident data to identify areas where roadway redesign changes such as shoulder widening, curb cuts, or adding sidewalks could create a safer more balanced travel environment for motorists, bicyclists, and pedestrians.

The report recommends shoulder-widening along the corridor to accommodate bicycles and improve the Route 7/Route 35 interchange to reduce speeding and make pedestrian crossing easier.

The plan also includes a design for a two-tiered parking garage for the Wilton train station, Lader said,

which would include space for retail stores.

"We're proposing something that we don't think is another ugly parking structure, but would allow for more parking at the station," Lader said.

State Rep. Gail Lavielle, R-143, who represents Wilton and Norwalk, said that a major initiative that Wilton residents have touted in recent years is a pedestrian bridge from downtown Wilton to the nearby train station, bypassing traffic on Route 33 and Route 7.

Corporate offices along Route 7 have a large number of inbound commuters going to the station, and more workers could take the railroad if walking safely to their offices from the station was easier, she said.

"There is a tension between making sure we respect the kind of semi-rural character of the whole corridor and at the same time do anything you can to cut down on traffic to make it easier for people to get from right where they are and what they are doing to the train," Lavielle said.

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