



State Highway 15

Almost 20 Years in the Works, Project Uncertain

How do community leaders make plans when they don't know when or if a major transportation project to benefit their community will happen? This is a situation in which too many communities in Wisconsin find themselves.

In the case of the Village of Hortonville in Outagamie County, residents and businesses in the community and surrounding areas have been waiting for the 11-mile State Highway 15 improvement project, which includes a bypass of the village, for decades.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Transportation website, planning for the Highway 15 corridor from the Town of Greenville to US 41 began prior to 2001. After at least a decade of study, the project was finally approved by the legislature and Governor Walker as part of the 2011-13 budget.

Since that time, there has been nothing but delays due to lack of funding – five years in total.

“There are so many different implications,” Village of Hortonville Administrator Diane Wessel said of the State Highway 15 project not being included in the last state budget.

Land for the project has been acquired and removed from the tax rolls. Economic development projects have been constructed with the assumption the bypass would be completed. Project-related safety improvements are delayed.

But the truth is, it is not just about when the project will be completed. **It is now uncertain the project, as planned, will be completed at all.** According to the February 2018 WisDOT report to the Transportation Projects Commission:

“The STH 15 project in Outagamie County schedule and scope is currently being reviewed by the department. This report reflects a two-year schedule delay.”

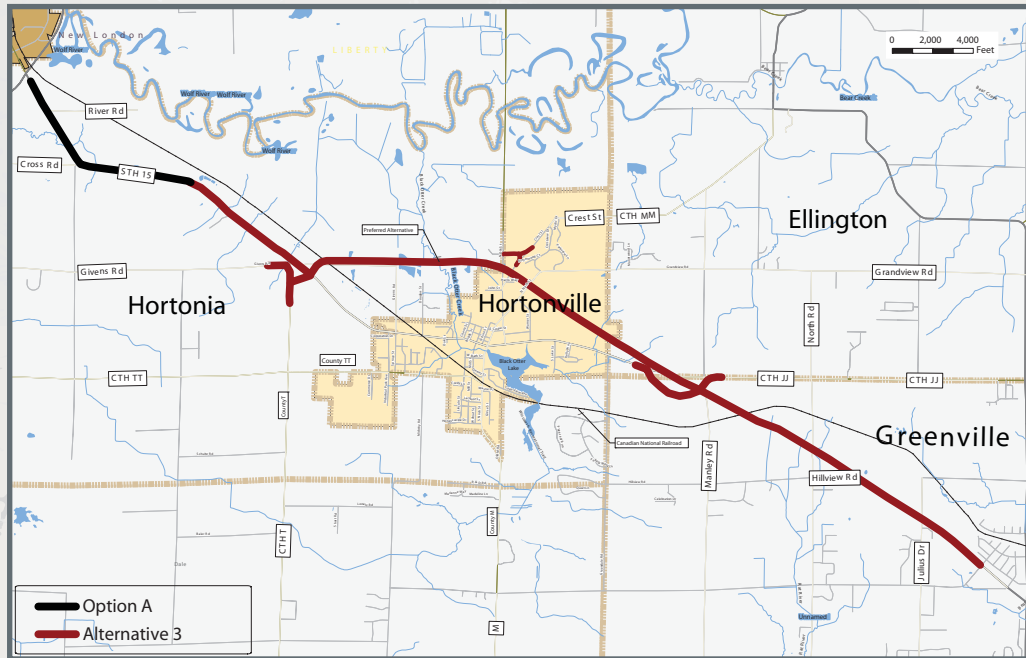
The August 2018 TPC report was silent regarding the fate of the project. However, inquiries to WisDOT's northeast regional office confirmed the scope and schedule are still under review.

Given Governor Walker's recent comments about the lack of need to increase capacity, it may be only a matter of time before projects like this are shelved indefinitely.



Why State Highway 15 Project is Necessary According to an Engineering Study

WIS 15 Selected Corridor



- This segment of STH 15 is an important regional route that connects the Appleton metropolitan area with Greenville, Hortonville, New London, and other local communities.
- STH 15 is designated as a state long truck route, important to commercial and economic development interests within the state.
- Traffic forecasts along the corridor exceed the threshold for a 4-lane facility and analysis shows that without an expansion, STH 15 has a failing level of service by 2040.
- Heavy regional traffic currently conflicts with local traffic through the village of Hortonville. Studies show 75% of eastbound traffic and 52% of westbound traffic have destinations beyond Hortonville.
- A STH 15 bypass of Hortonville is needed to separate the regional and local traffic. Expansion of existing STH 15 through the village is not an option due to narrow corridor and severe business/property impacts.
- The pavement is nearing a point where a more major infrastructure investment will be needed, such as reconstruction. Typically a pavement reconstruction is designed to last through a 50-year life-cycle. Therefore it is important to invest infrastructure monies on a highway that accommodates the future transportation needs of the corridor.
- Safety is a concern along the corridor. Roughly 300 existing access points along STH 15 and growing traffic volumes contribute to increasing conflicts along the corridor.