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Section: Local

Taking Morrison off course?

MORRISON — Morrison car dealer Bob Endress is no fan of the proposed U.S. **Route 30 bypass** around town. He disputes a state report that says car dealerships are minimally dependent on traffic or not at all. In the case of U.S. **30**, the **bypass** would mean less traffic through town.

"If they think businesses like ours won't be affected, they're crazy," said Endress, owner of Endress Pontiac & Buick.

The state Department of Transportation has been planning a southern or northern **bypass** around Morrison for the past few years.

the state's estimates, traffic would drop half with the **bypass**, which concerns businesses inside town.

The agency wants to widen U.S. **30** to four lanes from Rock Falls to Fulton.

Officials say it could be years down the road before the state gets the money for the project.

While many businesses in Morrison are concerned they could lose customers with the **bypass**, economic development agencies in Rock Falls and Sterling fully back the project.

"This is very important for Rock Falls," said Sandy Henrekin, executive director of the Rock Falls Community Development Corp. "There are a lot of people who use **Route 30**. With four lanes, the traffic will increase."

Endress, however, said he doesn't think the area needs a **bypass**. He said the dealership sells to customers from Chicago, Des Moines and other places. Out-of-town motorists drive the local dealerships, see cars they like, then call later and end up buying them, he said.

"You're talking about thousands of dollars lost in profit. We're probably affected more than other businesses in town. People have to be driving to see the cars. It's not a destination point," he said.

Mark Schuler, owner of Schuler Motors Inc. in Morrison, said he has mixed views about the **bypass**.

On one hand, he was concerned that the decline in traffic through town would hurt his business. On the other hand, the town as a whole could benefit from the new highway, he said.

"I don't know if it would be good or bad for Morrison," he said. "If it's something that would make Morrison grow and bring in more population, that would be better for my business and all businesses."

Doug Wiersema, president and CEO of the Rock Falls Chamber of Commerce, said his group supports the **bypass**. The chamber wants to make sure the state widens the highway to four lanes all the way to Rock Falls, he said.

Also, officials are hoping for a new industrial park in the area of a planned sewer plant near U.S. 30 on the west side of Rock Falls, he said. A four-lane road could greatly benefit such development, he said.

Heather Sotelo, executive director of the Greater Sterling Development Corp., said the **bypass** would benefit western Whiteside County.

"We've sent several support letters over the years for the expansion," she said.

The state had a public hearing Wednesday on the project. The state expects to choose a northern or southern **route** in 18 months.

The city of Morrison has said it favors the southern **route**.

State officials have said that when the **bypass** is built, the Department of Transportation could post signs directing traffic to Morrison's business district. They have acknowledged some businesses — particularly, restaurants — could suffer with the moving of U.S. 30 to the outskirts. Some may have to move to the new highway, they said.

In 2009, the state reported that a daily average of 11,000 cars travel on U.S. 30 through Morrison. If the state builds a **bypass** south of town, in-town traffic would plunge to 5,800 cars a day, state consultants say. With the northern **route**, the traffic would drop to 7,100.

The state is now working on a final environmental impact statement for the project, taking into account recent public feedback, said Rebecca Marruffo, a Department of Transportation project engineer.

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