

Oakwoods Road will close during construction of Cub Creek bridge

By CHARLES S. WILLIAMS

Wilkes Journal-Patriot Staff

A section of Oakwoods Road at the Cub Creek Bridge may be closed for up to a year, beginning in the fall of 2014, during the construction of a new two-lane bridge over the creek.

The Department of Transportation had originally told the town that the existing bridge would remain open during most of the construction period so that the traffic flow along Oakwoods Road would not be affected.

"The change was made when the bridge was redesigned recently," said Tracy Walter, a project development spokesman. "When the designers looked at the project again, they realized that the bridge would need to be longer because the creek's flood plain had been widened as part of the creek restoration work.

"The bridge, which will be constructed on the west, or upstream side of the existing structure, was originally designed as a 130-foot structure. Now it's designed to be 200 feet long." The 50 feet that were added on each side of the bridge will take the project into the existing traffic lanes of Oakwoods Road.

Walter added, "We might be able to keep the road open during the first month of the project while crews are working on the bridge superstructure, but the road would have to be closed after that point."

The project is expected to be let for bids in Sep-

tember 2014, with construction beginning in October or November. The expected time for construction is nine to 12 months.

Walter said that Wilkesboro officials had asked for several considerations in the design and construction of the bridge. One was the construction of sidewalks, protected by steel barriers, in both sides of the bridge, as well as a four-foot-wide bike lane. The second was a walkway beneath the bridge for the Yadkin River Greenway. Those are still in the design.

The third consideration was that the existing bridge remain open to traffic during most of the construction process.

Walter said that he sent out a news release in November 2012 stating that the bridge would remain open. Those were the plans then.

"But then two weeks ago I learned that the design had been changed and that the road would be closed during the project."

"Tracy called me this week and told me about the redesign, explaining that the work on the creek and the wider flood plains had caused the redesign," explained Wilkesboro Town Manager Ken Noland. "We've never seen any of the new designs. We have been putting in a new water line over there along Oakwoods Road based on where we were told the road would be going, and we hope that they will be out of the way of this construction."

"But we need to remember that when we first learned about the bridge

construction, one of the concerns we expressed was that the road was going to be closed for up to a year," Noland continued.

"The town council complained then, and plans were changed. I'm sure that the town council members will want their voices heard this time around as well. It sounds as though there will be more to come. That's a long time to close off that side of town.

"We have a voice, but we can't make the final decision."

Weight limit on bridge

Walter said that there was a weight limit on the existing bridge of 22 tons for a single vehicle and 26 tons for a tractor-trailer.

"The bridge still performs, and there are weight limit signs in place. It's safe enough for buses and tractor-trailers, but not for logging trucks."

Noland said that the new bridge could allow tractor-trailers to be rerouted along Oakwoods Road on a regular basis rather than driving through the downtown area.

Long-range plans call for Oakwoods Road be four-laned from U.S. 421 to the midway intersection with Main Street. A second, parallel bridge would be built at that time where the existing bridge is to handle traffic traveling toward Wilkesboro, while the bridge to be started next year would be used for traffic headed toward 421.

Edgewood Drive overlooked?

Noland said that the state designers seemed to have overlooked the fate of

Edgewood Drive, a town street just past the south end of the existing bridge which leads to several homes.

“It looks that that would come out on Oakwoods Road right in the middle of the construction,” Noland said. “I’ve heard that they would have to cut in a new temporary road, but that will also cause a long-term problem.”

“But I told Tracy I’d work on this from my end if he would work in it from his end. It sounds like a lot of miscommunication. I think it can be taken care of. It’s not a done deal, but this is the direction in which they’re moving now.”

A hope for relief

Noland said that he told Walter Tuesday afternoon that he was surprised to learn about the change, as the council members and public would be alarmed when this article on the change was published.

“Tracy said again that he wasn’t really sure how it had gotten to this point,” Noland said. “But he assured me that he was going to try to work backwards and see if he could figure out how it got to where it is and to see if there was anything he could do to change it. He said he could see where there could be some community reaction. I told him that he should get a head start because we would be ready to express our concerns after this newspaper hits the street.”