

A familiar funding hunt for Lebanon Road fix

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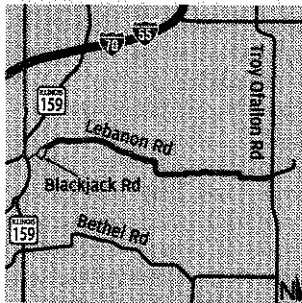
They held meetings, chatted with residents and crafted a preliminary blueprint, but now Madison County officials are facing a familiar roadblock in their long plans to fix a jarring section of Lebanon Road outside Collinsville: a void of funding.

"Everything depends on the dollars," said Gary Stahlhut, the county Highway Department engineer coordinating plans for the twisty, narrow lane east of the city. The goal is to straighten turns and widen the six-mile asphalt street, a busy artery between Spring Street near Downtown Collinsville and Scott-Troy Road.

Stahlhut and engineers last year developed several options for expanding the street and removing a tight railroad underpass near Arnotti Lane where accidents are common. Public meetings were held in May, but the proposal has mostly stalled since then.

So far, the County Board has not approved any additional cash for the final design. The county, like most area municipal agencies, has been forced to lay off workers and slice expenses as less money comes in from taxes.

Stahlhut said planners are looking for ways to pay for a consultant who will hash out a final design. They're hoping the Illinois Commerce Commission and federal government will pay for some of the fixes, although it's unclear if or when that cash will arrive. Knowing what money is in the pipeline will help determine the full scope of the



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Untwisting Lebanon Road

Problems: Six-mile stretch east of Collinsville has several jarring turns and narrow underpasses

The plans: Widen the street, relocate train tracks and soften some curves

What's holding it up: A void of funding for construction, which may cost up to \$20 million

project.

"Before we can do anything, we have to get an idea of how much it will cost," Stahlhut said.

Sandra Prost lives off Lebanon and has been following the process closely. Lately, though, nothing seems to be happening, even as the street continues to present dangers. "They've said funding has always been the issue," she said.

The price tag could clock in at around \$20 million once construction wraps, according to early estimates. Work is still at least four years away.

The most complicated element — relocating the Arnotti bridge and demolishing several homes — will probably cost the most and involve significant work with line operator CSX Corp. Stahlhut said the county is also negotiating with property owners.

Collinsville Township is expected to pick up the bridge tab, with the county providing some



FILE PHOTO One of several 90-degree turns on Lebanon Road outside Collinsville. A plan to fix the twisty street has stalled.

additional cash, he said.

Township Highway Commissioner Larry Trucano and Supervisor Terry Allan were both out of town last week and could not be reached for this story, township office workers said. Trucano is also a County Board

member.

Jarvis Township, which makes up the eastern section of Lebanon Road, will also chip in funding.

For now, Stahlhut said it's a waiting game for the county portion. "That's what we have to look for," he said.

Prost, the resident, said she's also been forced to wait — something residents along Lebanon have gotten used to.

"If you live on the road," she said, "you know how to deal with those issues."