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State to Repave Rt 1 in Darien This Summer: You Won't Believe What They're Considering

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The state Department of Transportation has informed town officials it plans to pave the Post Road through Darien this summer, Darien Police Capt. Donald Anderson told the Police Commission on Wednesday — and he passed on an unusual request.

Officials from the department commonly known as "ConnDOT" told town officials that they're aware of a traffic study about Route 1 done by the now-defunct Southwestern Regional Planning Agency (which has been replaced with the Western Council of Governments, commonly known as "WestCOG").

That traffic study suggested replacing one of the two lanes for traffic going in each direction with just one

lane apiece, and using the space created to paint in turning lanes on the road and such amenities as bicycle lanes. The state wants to know if the town thinks that's a good idea, in whole or, if in part, where the single lanes might work.

"They reached out to me, asking if the Legal Traffic Authority [which is the Police Commission in Darien] would be looking to implement any or all of the SWRPA recommendations as far as the roadway markings on U.S. 1," Anderson told the commission.

Technically, since Rt. 1 is a state-controlled roadway, ConnDOT can implement any or all of the changes, or make other changes, with or without the town's say-so, but ConnDOT officials want to know what Darien wants, Anderson said. He seemed to indicate that the officials were likely to go along with what the Legal Traffic Authority recommended.

"At this point, we kind of have to decide whether or not we think this is a good idea," he continued. "We wouldn't have to do everything [the study recommends]. We would have the option of doing it in one place but not in another."

One of Anderson's tasks as head of the Police Department's Administrative Services Bureau is to examine proposed traffic changes and recommend whether or not they're considered safe.

Well, It Could Just Possibly Work ... Partly

He indicated he has his doubts about making the whole roadway one lane, but he also said it could be useful in some places, and he isn't enough of an expert to know whether the scheme might work. SWRPA's own experts thought it would, and their study had some peer review from outside experts, he said.

"In theory, yes, I think this could be a viable option," Anderson said. "I'm not sure we'd want to do the entire stretch" as two lanes "but I do think it's something that we should look into. [...]"

"It's not outside of the realm of possibility that this could work, or at least in some area."

Darien should get a traffic consultant to look at the study and make recommendations town officials could consider, Anderson said. To that end, he said, he's contacted Frederick P. Clark Associates, which already does independent studies and reviews for town land use boards.

Michael Gallante, an executive vice president with the company, is looking into what kind of data SWRPA used for its study, to see if he might use it for a review. If it can be found, the company could suggest a price for its services, Anderson said.

'Dreadful'

Commissioner Thomas Joyce said, "I'm sure they [SWRPA] looked into it when they did [...] the study [but]"

it seems like a dreadful idea when you take in how many people use Rt. 1 as a shortcut, particularly during [heavy] traffic hours. Rt. 1 during heavy traffic hours is very unpleasant."

Anderson replied that that was the reason he wanted to hear from an independent traffic engineer. ConnDOT officials have said that while Rte. 1 isn't working well now under heavy traffic, it might not fare much worse with single through lanes in either direction.

"My concern is: Are we going to back up traffic into Stamford?" Joyce said. Anderson said he'd been thinking about that, too.

"I think there is some merit to some of their ideas, and I think it's worth exploring," Anderson said.

SIDEBAR:

One Change ConnDOT Officials Insist on for Rt. 1 in Darien

There is one spot where ConnDOT officials said they insist on creating only one lane for through traffic on the Post Road — where cars already park in front of Mama Carmela's and neighboring businesses just east of the intersection of the Post Road and Noroton Avenue.

For some distance before that, perhaps as far as St. Luke's Church and the Noroton Fire Department Headquarters, all westbound traffic would be in a single lane. ConnDOT officials told Anderson that they hadn't realized that permission had already been given for parking near the intersection.

Commissioner Kim Huffard said that with cars there already, 90 percent of the time it shouldn't make a difference if the roadway is officially one lane or not. Anderson pointed out that even late at night when no cars are parked there, westbound traffic will officially be allowed in only one lane at that spot.