

Rep. Allen: Update on West Waukesha bypass

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A stretch of road with 160 crashes, 13 serious injuries and a fatality in the last five years.

A train crossing with no crashes in the last 25 years.

Waukesha County, the Department of Transportation (DOT), the City of Waukesha and the Town of Waukesha have been working on a solution to fix an unsafe road. County Trunk Highway TT (Merrill Hills Road), especially between Highway 18 and County Highway D, has proven to be deadly. According to county documents, the crash rate is 2.5 times higher than on comparable rural highways.

This project, unique in tying together government, communities, and funding, began construction earlier this year and included an at-grade crossing. Unfortunately, it was determined late last month that a separated-grade crossing—a bridge—was necessary based on a guess of increased rail traffic in the year 2037.

The addition of this bridge will increase costs by about \$7 million and delay the project's completion by several years. It could also put the completion of the project at risk, as the original Memorandum of Understanding capped costs at \$50.7 million. Delaying the project to build a bridge, which may or may not be necessary for another 20 years, will only prolong the hassles of construction on the residents. More importantly, it will subject drivers to a longer period of unsafe road conditions.

As I understand it, Commissioner of Railroads Yash Wadhwa was bound by the findings of fact by the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) who oversaw the hearing.

However, I believe a new hearing is warranted under the circumstances. Not only did the ALJ misstate 11 material facts, new evidence which was not available at the time of the hearing is now available. That information—on economic loss, hardship, and purchase of additional easements—should now be considered.

I hope Commissioner Wadhwa will order a new hearing to ensure that such a costly and impactful decision is informed and appropriately made. Doing so would have a tangible effect, saving lives and taxpayer dollars.