

‘Redefine the Drive’ to include public input



A rendering shows how North Lake Shore Drive might appear at Foster Avenue. (Chicago Department of Transportation)

BY KATIE SURMA

Plans to modernize seven miles of North Lake Shore Drive between Grand and Hollywood avenues are moving ahead, and members of the public will have an opportunity to weigh in on what future changes will look like.

After two years of studying engineering, environmental and socioeconomic impacts, officials have narrowed down options for the roughly \$3 billion project to five alternatives. While funding has not been secured, the study, now in the public comment phase, is required for federal funding eligibility, according to Nathan Roseberry, the assistant chief highway engineer at the Chicago Department of Transportation. The Illinois and Chicago Departments of Transportation are directing the study.

Efforts to revamp the area are meant to address both traffic and shoreline issues. Transit enhancements are aimed at improving bus travel time and reliability while shoreline protection efforts are meant to safeguard North Lake Shore Drive from flooding.

The five proposals vary by the number of traffic lanes and bus lanes as well as whether motorists will be able to pay to use bus lanes. All of the plans include improvements for shoreline protection, park access and traffic signals.

The first option maintains the existing number of general-purpose traffic lanes and adds queue jump lanes so buses can bypass traffic to enter and exit Lake Shore Drive. The other four alternatives build on this option.

Two options include a dedicated bus lane in each direction along with exit ramps for buses. The other alternatives include one or two “flexible lanes,” which would be shared by buses and motorists who pay an additional fee.

Due to public health concerns caused by the coronavirus, there will be no in-person public meetings to discuss the proposed changes.

Instead, members of the public can visit an interactive website that includes audiovisual presentations, maps, and project details. The “Redefine the Drive” website, located at www.nlsdinput.org, also has public “walls” where people can post comments about the project.

People also have the option to attend live, in-person webinars where they can speak with project planners. Each webinar will last 60 minutes and host up to 20 people, Chicago Department of Transportation spokesman Michael Claffey said. Additional webinars will be added if needed.

“It’s an unusual time but we want to keep moving forward while we can,” Claffey said. “We want folks to check it out and tell us what they think and what their preferences are.”

The public comment period begins Monday and runs through Nov. 9, though the initial planning period will continue through 2022, according to Roseberry.