

MIDDLETOWN

Officials pave way to fix highway merge

The plan would install a T-intersection with a traffic light at northbound Route 213 and Business Route 1.

*BY CHRIS ENGLISH COURIER TIMES
Chris English can be reached at 215-949-4193 or .*

Help is on the horizon for motorists weary of the nerve-taxing merge of northbound Route 213 and northbound Business Route 1.

At Tuesday's meeting, the Middletown supervisors approved spending \$84,300 for township Traffic Engineer Brian Keaveney of Pennoni Associates to design a plan that would remove the merge and install a more standard T-intersection with a traffic light. The actual project itself would cost somewhere between \$400,000 and \$500,000, according to Keaveney's rough estimate, but he has emphasized that the number could change as his design work moves along.

Since both highways are state roads, the project would have to be approved by PennDOT. Middletown officials are hoping that by paying for the engineering, construction on the improvement can start sooner.

It might happen even quicker if the township can fund construction through a grant program administered by the Redevelopment Authority of the County of Bucks with money from the Philadelphia Park Casino in Bensalem. Last year, Middletown used \$675,000 it got from the grant program to fund an addition to the William Penn Fire Company station on Bristol Oxford Valley Road.

Township officials are hoping this year's grant will fund the Route 213-Business 1 improvement so the township doesn't have to wait on funding from PennDOT.

"I believe this might be the worst traffic spot in Middletown," said township Supervisor Robert McMonagle.

At the spot, motorists on northbound Route 213 look to their right and try to merge with traffic on busy Business Route 1. The situation is made worse for motorists who have just merged onto Business 1 but must then get over to the far right to get off at the exit for the Oxford Valley Mall.

According to PennDOT statistics, the roughly half-mile stretch of Business Route 1 that includes the merge area had 102 accidents from 2002 to 2006, with no fatalities. The same length stretch of Route 213 that includes the merge area had 352 accidents, with two fatalities.

In a related matter, Keaveney said he's working with PennDOT on again allowing left-hand turns from southbound Woodbourne Road onto northbound Business Route 1, an intersection located only about a quarter-mile from the 213-Business 1 merge.

The left turn has been prohibited for many years, and motorists who want to get on northbound Business 1 often pass through the intersection and make an immediate left into a parking lot of a small strip center, and then turn right onto Business 1. Allowing the left also would reduce traffic at the 213-Business 1 merge, Keaveney said.

He is hoping the left turns will be allowed again by July or August.