

Two Safe Routes to School Demonstration Projects to Open along Big Lake Road

Starting in mid-October, two intersections along Big Lake Road will look a bit different. The Tribe is working with state and county partners to install temporary street improvements to provide more comfortable spaces for people walking and biking. The two installations, referred to as “demonstration projects,” will be installed at the intersections of Big Lake Road and University Road/Brevator Road and at Big Lake Road and Trettel Lane/Reservation Road. Demonstration projects use low-cost and temporary materials like traffic paint and flexible plastic posts to test and evaluate potential long-term roadway changes.

Over the past several months, the Tribe has been working with the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) and Carlton County to identify the challenges faced for people walking and biking across Big Lake Road (also known as Carlton County Road 7). The two intersections were chosen based on nearby destinations in the area, including the Fond Du Lac Ojibwe School. The June 30 crash that left a 13-year old bicyclist seriously injured reinforced the need for changes to the roadway. “Several projects over the years have identified these intersections as dangerous. Tribal members have told us that drivers are going too fast on Big Lake Road and it makes it very hard to cross,” said MnDOT Project Manager Hannah Pritchard.

The goal of the project is to make walking and biking across Big Lake Road easier, safer, and more comfortable. It will use paint and flexible plastic posts to reduce crossing distances, narrow the roadway to slow traffic, and increase visibility of people walking and biking. “A demonstration project gives the Fond du Lac community a chance to try things out before they become permanent. It also raises awareness of some of the challenges for people walking and biking in the area.” Pritchard said.

The outcomes from this demonstration project could influence more permanent changes, too. Next spring, Carlton County plans to resurface this section of Big Lake Road and will be considering how to make it more welcoming to people walking and biking. Project staff plan to evaluate the installation by measuring speeds and administering a public perception survey.

The design shown below is scheduled to be installed the week of October 12. People driving in the area should expect to slow down on Big Lake Road as crews install the project. Once installed, one of two turn lanes in each direction at both intersections will be closed, though drivers will still be able to make all turning movements from a shared lane. “The left and right turn lanes were just installed at these intersections a few years ago, but we thought it was important to find space for people crossing Big Lake Road to be able to cross one direction at a time. We’re hopeful that drivers will adapt to the change easily.” said Pritchard.

This project is funded by the Minnesota Department of Transportation through their Safe Routes to School program and is being installed in partnership with Carlton County. To learn more about

demonstration projects, visit <https://dot.state.mn.us/saferoutes/demonstration-projects.html> or contact MnDOT Project Manager Hannah Pritchard at hannah.pritchard@state.mn.us.

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