

Dual-rail overpass would give city an economic advantage (Guest View)

By JEFFREY MARSTERS, Mason City Councilman, First Ward

The 19th Street Southwest overpass, with the potential of a second rail provider, could be a big step toward growth in Mason City with little or no impact to citizens living in the immediate area.

First, it is quite unlikely that business would locate close to neighborhoods. If business is to locate in the newly annexed area, it will likely be as close to the Avenue of the Saints as possible for obvious reasons.

Companies want the visibility and immediate access to the Avenue (not 19th Street). Just look at cities with development as you travel I-35. The development is as close to the interstate as possible.

As you are well aware, the most common request of citizens in Mason City is to get more and better-paying jobs. This is what your City Council is trying to accomplish; a better life and lower taxes with growth of business and good jobs for all.

An overpass that accommodates two railroad providers under it would place Mason City among a very few industrial sites that offer large, fully serviced parcels close to interstate highways with dual rail service.

Only three other cities in Iowa offer such sites. And in a 15-state search, fewer than 30 cities offer sites with this competitive advantage.

A second rail provider could be years away or never happen. However, it can never happen if we don't look ahead when building this overpass.

A little history: A railroad overpass has been contemplated for years and was initially presented to Mason City's federal legislators by a delegation from the city of Mason City, Chamber of Commerce and the Economic Development Corp. in February 2005.

In November 2005, the delegation was advised to focus on the economic development aspect of the overpass to differentiate this project from the numerous overpass-funding requests lawmakers receive.

In January 2006, the Mason City delegation's funding proposal emphasized the competitive advantage of two rail providers as well as the federal and local investment already made in the newly annexed area.

The federal contribution to the project is anticipated to be approximately 25 percent of the total project cost of about \$8 million — a huge savings to the taxpayers of Mason City.

Specifically, this refers to the provision to design the overpass so two railroad providers can fit under the bridge.

To change the design of the overpass to only allow one provider could significantly damage the credibility of the Mason City delegation with our federal legislators. The feds saw this advantage as a better investment than other communities asking for funding.

It is a council decision that could have a long-lasting impact on the city of Mason City. It is in no way an attempt to reduce the quality of life to the citizens living in the area.

We have and will continue to work with Golden Grain to reduce the noise from the exhaust fans and will look carefully to quality-of-life issues if further development continues.

The proposed zoning ordinance for that area will be different than others in Mason City. It is proposed to require any new business to go to the City Council for final approval, not simply have to abide by the type of zoning.

This not only gives the council an opportunity to deny undesirable businesses but also gives you, the citizen, the ability to be heard privately with council members or at public City Council meetings with any concerns about a newly proposed business in that area.

Quality of life is truly of prime importance to the city council.