Clemson hopes bridge replacement project can resume soon

BY GREG OLIVER
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CLEMSON — Clemson City Administrator Rick Cotton said Monday night that meetings with other parties involved in the bridge replacement and road-widening project on S.C.133 are continuing to show progress.

"We're getting closer to negotiating the project without any dramatic changes," Cotton told City Council during its regularly scheduled meeting.

However, Mayor J.C. Cook, who, along with council member Crossie Cox, has attended the previous two meetings with officials, wasn't quite as thrilled.

"I don't feel they (Norfolk Southern) came off with what needed to be done to make this project possible to go through," Cook said. "They were quite adamant about (not) coming off things."

Cook said the city had requested the Clemson train depot serving Amtrak passengers be temporarily closed for four to five months while construction was taking place.

"Passengers would have gone to Greenville during that time, causing a temporary inconvenience to passengers here," he said. "But with Clemson University and Greenlink that now provides bus service from Clemson to Greenville, it would not be as big an inconvenience as in the past. They claim they cannot do that monetarily, but when you look at the number of individuals coming off the train (about 15 per day), the numbers just don't add up for us."

When asked about the cost savings the city could realize by having passengers temporarily transferred to Greenville, Cook replied, "It would be in the neighborhood of $100,000 for five months."

Cook said the lack of cooperation from Norfolk Southern was puzzling, especially since the railroad company will ultimately have "a nice ADA-accessible platform" as part of the project.

"If they could at least pony up some of the money, it would help," Cook said.

Council member Jim Oswald said he is also upset with Norfolk Southern, adding, "It sounds like they're trying to get a whole lot out of people's money."

"It doesn't sit well with me," he said.

Cotton said the entire bridge replacement and road-widening budget is in the $15 million range, including the platform. At one point, he said the figure had reached upwards of $18 million before being whittled down to the existing figure.

The project was halted in June 2012, in order to allow for the design of temporary and permanent Amtrak facilities. Despite the aggravations that have seemingly been present from the very beginning, city officials say the most beneficial aspect will be the improvement in fire response to that area of the city and a reduction in flooding which occurs under the underpass as a result of heavy rain.

"It's been a huge inconvenience, not only for Clemson, but also those going north, south, east or west that have to access that intersection," Cotton said.



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Clemson city officials hope the bridge replacement and road-widening project on S.C. 133 can begin within the coming months. Officials say cost overruns that have delayed the project, which once amounted to more than $4 million, have been reduced to $1.3 million. The S.C. 133 project will also involve widening the road, pictured above, in order to allow greater access for emergency vehicles and reduce flooding that often occurs under the underpass during heavy rains.

