Will east meet west on Blue Star Trail?

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“East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet” ... unless it means the Blue Star Trail circumventing the Lake Street entrance to downtown Saugatuck.

Douglas and Saugatuck Township — with help from federal and state grants, plus the nonprofit Friends of the Blue Star Trail — completed stretches of the nonmotorized path envisioned linking the area south to South Haven, on the west side of Blue Star Highway, last year.

The City of Saugatuck has held out, voicing safety concerns about traversing the Lake Street intersection, spurring west to downtown, north of the Blue Star bridge, and legacy costs for maintaining the trail.

With that gap remaining, and absent a resolution, the path may continue “a trail to nowhere,” some city officials say.

To address those concerns and move forward, the Friends commissioned city engineers Fleis & Vandenbrink to conduct an $18,000 study to determine the safety, cost and functionality of the proposed trail traversing Saugatuck city limits on both Blue Star’s west and east sides.


From the city’s vantage, building on the east side of Blue Star would bypass the Lake Street corner entirely and make obvious sense from that safety standpoint.

From another view, issues exist on either side for the path’s full 20-mile duration, the Saugatuck east side option would involve crossing the highway twice as opposed to Lake Street once and stands to cost twice as much.

Study route comparisons shared with council the day after Christmas showed the east side option costing an estimated $1.9 million, not including private utility relocation costs, and the west side alternative $1.2 million.

More details: Proposed Lake Street/Blue Star Highway configurations show the nonmotorized trail on Blue Star’s east side and west.
East Side

Under this option, the existing Blue Star Highway crossing at Main Street in Douglas would be enhanced.

The trail would transition from behind the existing curb at Main to a widened sidewalk on the bridge, using slope grading, retaining wall, guardrail relocation and fencing where required.

The existing 5-foot sidewalk on the bridge would be widened to 14 feet by reducing the lane and shoulder widths.

Between the bridge and Lake Street, the trail would transition back behind the existing curb to allow the existing lane layout to be preserved. This would require significant retaining wall construction, and the guardrail would be relocated.

At Lake Street, a crosswalk would be constructed to allow northbound trail users access to downtown Saugatuck. The existing stop-controlled intersection would remain.

Between Lake Street and Bridge Street, retaining wall would be used to transition the trail from behind the curb to partially within the existing roadway.

At Maple Street, a crosswalk would be installed to connect to the future portion of the trail between Maple and Old Allegan Road. A traffic signal or enhanced crossing would be provided at Old Allegan to connect to the existing trail.

The estimated $1.9-million needed for this option (Main to Maple streets only) does not include potential private utility relocation costs, which could be significant.
West Side

Under this option, the existing island at Main and Washington Streets in Douglas and the Blue Star crossing would be removed to allow the trail and sidewalk to be merged. The existing sidewalk between Main Street and the bridge would be widened by narrowing the lanes and shoulders.

The existing 7-foot sidewalk on the bridge would be widened to 14 feet by reducing the lane and shoulder widths. Between the bridge and Lake Street, the trail would transition from partially within the existing roadway to behind the existing tree line, continuing to widen the existing sidewalk.

A new crosswalk would be installed across Lake Street, installing a traffic signal at Lake and Blue Star Highway. The northwest curb would be relocated to provide space for the trail between the road and the palette sign, leaving space for a landscape area around the sign.

Between Lake and Maple streets, the trail would transition from partially within the existing roadway to outside the existing roadway using a combination of retaining wall and ditch enclosure.

A crosswalk would be constructed across Maple to connect to the future portion of the trail between it and Old Allegan Road. The $1.2-million estimate for this approach would not require potential private utility relocation costs.
Council did not comment on either proposal and plans to revisit trail talks at a yet-to-be-scheduled workshop.

The first line of Rudyard Kipling’s “The Ballad of East and West” cited here was criticized by some as racist, neglecting the third and fourth lines: “But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth/When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!”

Respect for each other’s worthiness prevails, those lines seem to say.