

# Roundabout proposed for downtown Fairbanks

By AMANDA BOHMAN

FAIRBANKS — Transportation decision-makers are looking at putting a roundabout in downtown Fairbanks north of the Cushman Street bridge.

The Fairbanks Metropolitan Area Transportation System policy committee, known as FMATS, voted unanimously Wednesday to evaluate the cost of a roundabout and how it would impact the overall road construction scene downtown.

The panel is stacked with elected officials, including mayors, a councilman and an assemblyman.

The roundabout would be incorporated into ongoing transportation projects to rebuild Illinois, Cushman and Barnette streets. Also, another bridge is being erected across the Chena River. Construction is slated to start later this year or next summer, depending on progress. Northern region transportation director Steve Titus said roundabouts are usually cheaper than traffic signals.

Still, he's not sure it's practical to add a roundabout to the road projects at this late stage. The idea was rejected by FMATS previously to speed up construction, Titus said. "If we're going to change course here, there's ramifications," Titus told fellow FMATS committee members at a meeting on Wednesday.

Fairbanks Mayor Terry Strle is pressing for reconsideration of a roundabout, which is called for in the Vision Fairbanks downtown plan.

Titus said adding a roundabout could force the state to acquire even more property in the area. Two apartment buildings, a hardware store, a barber shop and restaurants have moved or closed to accommodate road construction.

The roundabout would be located in front of the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner building. News-Miner Publisher Marilyn Romano is reserving comment until she sees a detailed plan. The existing draft road plan, which calls for traffic signals, removes the News-Miner's front parking lot.

"I already have concerns about the current plan," Romano said.

John Jackovich owns the Big I bar, which also butts against area road plans. Jackovich has mixed feelings. He said road improvements are good for downtown, and he'd like his business to be a part of it. Jackovich could move the bar, but "I'm successful right there," he said. "I don't know how this is all going to shake out," Jackovich said. Negotiations for the state to buy the bar have not taken place, he said. "We're not even near that yet," he said.

The July 14 meeting will be at 10 a.m. at the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities office on Peger Road.