



\$140M plan to ease area's worst gridlock

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WEST BLOOMFIELD TWP. - Relief is finally on the way for some of the worst traffic congestion in Oakland County.

Officials broke ground Tuesday on the \$40 million first phase of what ultimately could be a \$140 million plan to deal with rushhour gridlock in West Bloomfield Township and Farmington Hills.

Congestion is caused by motorists trying to get from the point where Northwestern Highway ends at Orchard Lake Road to M-5, also known as the Haggerty Connector.

The initial work includes widening the half-mile stretch of West Maple Road in front of the Henry Ford Medical Center in West Bloomfield Township from two to three lanes, and constructing a roundabout at Maple and Drake roads. Utility work will begin this fall; most of the construction will be in the spring.

Road Commission for Oakland County spokesman Craig Bryson said it's expected the contracts will be awarded in 2007 on the construction of two more roundabouts at Maple and Farmington roads and 14 Mile and Farmington roads.

Plans then call for contracts to be awarded sometime in 2008 on the construction of five more roundabouts at Maple and Haggerty roads, Maple and Orchard Lake roads, 14 Mile and Drake roads, 14 Mile and Haggerty roads and 14 Mile and Orchard Lake roads and the widening of Orchard Lake Road between 14 Mile and Maple roads in West Bloomfield Township and Farmington Hills.

Funding for the first phase of the Northwestern Connector project includes \$30 million from the Michigan Department of Transportation; \$2 million from the Oakland County Board of Commissioners; \$2.1 million from West Bloomfield Township; \$400,000 from Farmington Hills; \$1.5 million in federal grants obtained by U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg, R-Bloomfield Township; and \$3 million from the road commission.

The road commission already has awarded a \$1.8 million contract to L.D. D'Agostini & Sons Inc. of Macomb Township for the construction of the roundabout at the intersection of Maple and Drake roads and a \$350,000

contract has been awarded to John Carlo Inc. of Clinton Township to widen West Maple Road in front of the Henry Ford Medical Center.

"We expect that, when construction is completed, our major roads will be less congested, safer and smoother than they have been for many years and motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, bus riders and others will have an improved quality of life," West Bloomfield Township Supervisor David Flaisher said.

Farmington Hills Mayor Vicki Barnett said improvements should reduce traffic congestion and gridlock.

In January, a team of experts completed an engineering study needed so that more than \$25 million in federal highway funds could be spent on the first phase of the project.

The value engineering team examined the proposed project and provided a detailed report that agreed with the choice of the major design elements of the project, including the use of roundabouts to improve traffic flow and increase safety, Bryson has said.

Roundabouts, which were originally designed in England, allow traffic to move smoothly through an intersection in much the same manner as traffic merges onto a freeway.

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