



This is the proposed route of I-696 from I-75 through Southfield and Lathrup Village to Northwestern Highway. In the planning stages

for 20 years, the freeway is still tied up in environmental impact studies and recommended changes in design.

I-696: Nothing but roadblocks

By JACKIE KLEIN

The proposed I-696 east-west expressway, on the drawing boards for nearly two decades, will continue to take a number of detours before it becomes a concrete reality through Southfield.

Martin Convisser, acting assistant secretary for environment, safety and consumer affairs of U.S. Department of Transportation, still isn't satisfied with the "final" environmental impact statement for construction of the freeway from Lahser to I-75.

Worse yet, according to Roger Smith, Southfield transportation director, Convisser is proposing an alternate route south of Ten Mile to protect the Detroit Zoo and parklands and recreation areas in Oak Park, Pleasant Ridge, and Huntington Woods.

"The arbitrated I-696 alignment between Southfield Road and Coolidge dips from Eleven to Ten Mile," Smith said. "The route recommended by Convisser for the eight-mile segment of the proposed freeway through

Southfield would isolate 57 families from school districts, take 34 homes and have adverse environmental effects.

"We have been asked to document the disadvantages of the alternate route, and we're in the process of doing that now. We have already gone on record as favoring the arbitrated route."

"WE HAVE reviewed the final environmental impact statement for the proposed eight mile segment of I-696 from Lahser to I-75 in Oakland County," Convisser said. "We're aware of the long history of planning and need for the project. But several issues must be analyzed before the department can take further action."

The arbitrated alignment, Convisser said, would have required about one acre from Detroit Zoological Park, including the main entrance and a portion of the parking lot. The recommended alignment, he said, would avoid taking any zoo property but would still have negative impacts on the "sensitive" area. These should be fully documented, he said, and measures taken to remedy the problems.

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"The recommended I-696 route will require acquisition of property from publicly-owned recreation areas," Convisser said. "It would intersect Victoria Park in Oak Park and leave unusable parcels."

"It would appear feasible to avoid the park by constructing I-696 to the south of it in the Fairfax to Coolidge segment. This would require more right-of-way and cost \$6 million more than the recommended route. The alternate segment will also require relocation of Ten Mile with possible impacts on traffic flow."

CONSTRUCTION of the alternate route, Convisser contended, would displace 79 fewer properties than the recommended alignment. Continuation of the alternate route to the south of Ten Mile from Coolidge to Rosewood, Convisser said, would avoid the necessity of taking property from Rackham Golf Course in Huntington Woods. Fewer properties would be displaced than with the proposed route, he maintained.

Convisser said he was also concerned with the impact of the proposed freeway on Pleasant Ridge recreation area. He suggested lowering the expressway grade through the section by four feet and constructing an eight foot noise barrier.

The final environmental impact statement concludes that I-696 is consistent with the Michigan State implementation plan for meeting national air quality standards, Convisser said.

"The statement provides no analysis of hydrocarbon emissions or impact of the project on air quality," Convisser said. "Detroit Mayor Coleman Young has expressed concern over the issue because Michigan Environmental Protection Agency in August, 1976 said its implementation plan is substantially inadequate to maintain clean air standards."

"No comments have been included from the appropriate state air quality agency with respect to the air quality impacts on the project. The final impact statement should provide current indications from these agencies on the consistency of I-696 with the state implementation plan."

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