

Freeway targeted for improvement

Continued from Page 1

Farmington Hills, and Richard Fessler, R-West Bloomfield, and State Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, plus officials from Southfield, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield attended the conference.

Pitz's announcement was just the news local officials have been waiting for as traffic and development continue to grow at unprecedented rates.

"I'm very heartened," West Bloomfield Township Supervisor John Doherty said. "We have all been working for it for about one year. It's pretty committed."

Farmington Hills City Manager William Costick's response was similar. "I am very pleased that state officials have formally recognized the severity of the traffic problems along the I-696 corridor."

The state's commitment to resolving burgeoning traffic problems came little more than two months after Gov. James Blanchard toured the freeway corridor and promised the state would act.

MDOT's recommendations are the result of a long-term study — conducted with the help of suburban officials — that identified traffic problems and specific improvements to improve well-known bottlenecks.

"I-696 is one of the most important transportation routes and is growing more important every day," Southfield Mayor Pro Tempore Suzanne Goldstein said. "One of our longtime dreams is becoming a reality."

Farmington Hills Mayor Joe Alkateeb echoed Goldstein's sentiments.

"I might as well add my delight. The governor should be applauded for his leadership. He has demonstrated it over and over. We are overjoyed. All I want to do is sit down with Mr. Pitz and move it ahead," Alkateeb said.

Proposed improvements under the five-year plan include:

- Widening I-696 to eight lanes (four in each direction) from the I-96/I-275 interchange east to Telegraph. Construction of the additional lanes would be completed down the freeway's existing median.

- Widening would be started in 1988 and completed in late 1989, just before the opening of the eastern segment of I-696 that is currently under construction. Estimated cost is \$25 million.

- Increasing capacity of the Orchard Lake Road interchange. The plan includes ramp improvements and possibly the addition of more loops to provide traffic relief.



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— Joe Alkateeb
Hills mayor

Work would be completed in 1989 or 1990 at an estimated cost of \$3 million to \$5 million.

- Adding an interchange near Inkster Road in Southfield. Construction could begin by 1989 and would cost an estimated \$6 million to \$7 million.

- Adding an interchange at Drake Road in Farmington Hills. Construction could begin in 1991. Estimated cost of the new interchange is \$3 million to \$4 million.

- Adding an interchange at Haggerty. The project also would involve widening the thoroughfare from I-696 to Maple in West Bloomfield and Commerce townships. MDOT's goal is to begin construction in late 1988 or 1989. The estimated cost of the interchange connection is \$22 million to \$35 million.

BECAUSE I-696 is part of the federal interstate system, federal money will pay 90 percent of the project costs. The remaining 10 percent will be paid with state money, Pitz said.

"We have federal blessing for every one of these concepts," Pitz told reporters at the press conference.

MDOT officials expect federal approval of financing by 1987 for the proposed I-696 widening. But each of the five major projects will require separate federal financing approval, plus a series of public hearings and public involvement, Pitz said.

Task forces have been formed for each of the five projects. Environmental impact studies and rights-of-way acquisition are required for all but the proposed I-696 widening, said Bob Kirkbride, MDOT unit supervisor of the urban transportation planning division.

Pitz also called for continued local community support for the

freeway corridor improvements. He cautioned that lack of cooperation from suburban residents and officials would only slow completion of needed improvements.

While MDOT is working on the I-696 corridor, area officials are expected to proceed with planned local road projects, such as improving 12 Mile and Drake in Farmington Hills and near Inkster in Southfield, Pitz said.

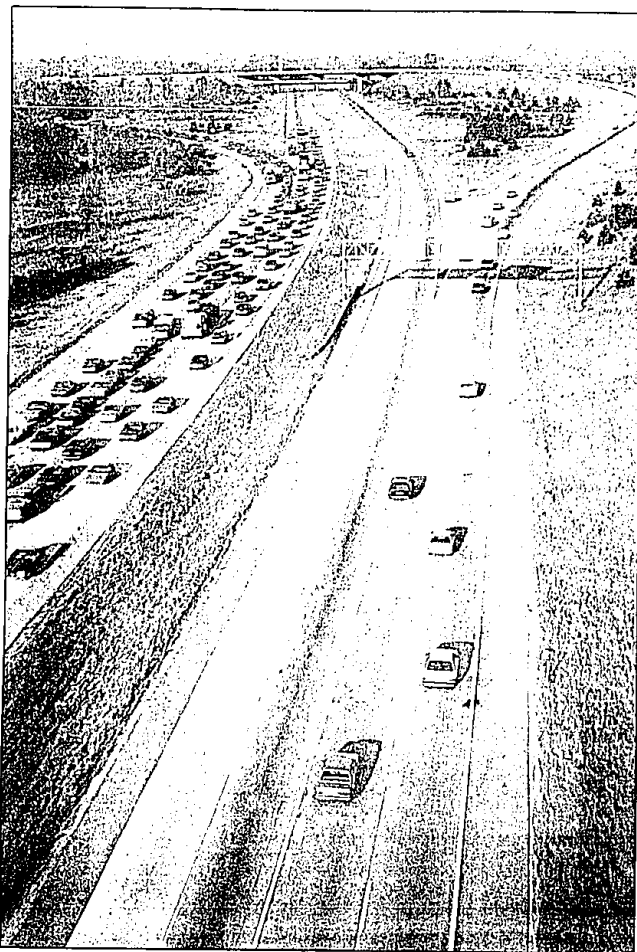
"It's extremely important that local road improvements be made nearly at the same time. We need cooperation between state and local government, not just planning, but implementation of projects," Kirkbride told officials at a meeting of the 13-member Joint Farmington Hills-West Bloomfield Township road study committee.

Local officials and Oakland County Road Commission representatives have been working together to find solutions to traffic problems along 12 Mile, for example.

"The county has to get up with an innovative way to get money (for county road improvements). We have to move forward head-on with traffic problems that are getting worse," Costick said.

Each of the MDOT projects will have its own timetable as well as a type of "Lodgeability" program to ease the disruptions of construction at the various sites, Pitz said.

COMMENTING ON the MDOT announcement, Faxon said planned improvements have brought "peace and harmony" to an area — Southfield, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield Township — where the "potential for discord" has existed. "It's important to note that there is progress in our lifetime," he said.



A skyview look at I-696 in the Farmington Hills area.

Spurt in growth makes freeway outmoded

By Joanno Maliszewski
staff writer

When I-696 was built in 1964, state and federal transportation officials planned it as nothing more than a four-lane rural freeway running through Southfield and Farmington Township.

Times have changed. People have changed. What was once considered a rural area has become the hotbed of unprecedented growth and development for Oakland County and Michigan.

Burgeoning development no doubt has brought prosperity and mobility to Farmington Hills, Southfield and West Bloomfield Township. But the communities are also paying a high price for success with overwhelming traffic congestion and road problems.

Michigan Department of Transportation Director James Pitz's announcement Tuesday of major plans to improve the I-696 corridor brought a sigh of relief to local officials who have been struggling with road and traffic issues for the last couple of years.

In response to obvious increased freeway use and repeated concerns by local governmental officials, MDOT initiated a study of the I-696 corridor in the summer of 1984.

A committee — comprised of state and local officials — was formed and charged with identifying existing problems and to recommend solutions.

THE PROPOSED projects announced by Pitz Tuesday are the result of the MDOT study and urge by Gov. James Blanchard to move as fast as possible to improve traffic conditions along the I-696 corridor.

The proposed improvements — widening I-696 and adding three new interchanges — are expected to improve current traffic problems as well as accommodate future growth, Pitz said.

Consider that by the 1990s, 11 million square feet of office space will be built in Southfield and Farmington Hills. The new development is expected to provide 65,000 new jobs for people who obviously must use the state and local road network. Another 6,000 square feet and 30,000 new jobs are expected in Novi, Pitz said.

In Farmington Hills, 12 Mile to the current focus of growth. Office development now exceeds 13 million square feet and provides 4,900 jobs. An additional 3.6 million square feet of office space is currently under development. By 1990, almost 5 million square feet of space providing an estimated 18,400 jobs is expected.

The same type of projections are offered for Southfield. An additional 5 million square feet of development is planned for the city in the next five years. The majority of this development is expected in an area immediately south of I-696 between Inkster and Telegraph.

'Traffic leaving the freeway becomes bottlenecked, causing frequent back-ups on the freeway, adding to the congestion on I-696.'

— Bob Kirkbride
MDOT unit supervisor

LIKE FARMINGTON HILLS, Novi's growth is also targeted for 12 Mile, as well as the Novi Road/I-96 and Haggerty Road/I-275 interchanges.

With the proposed five major projects, MDOT officials are trying to cure today's problems while looking to the future, Pitz said.

I-696 from Telegraph in Southfield to I-96/I-275 needs widening to accommodate more than 67,200 vehicles that daily travel the eight-mile stretch. The freeway was originally built to handle the rural daily traffic volume of 16,200 vehicles. Widening will double the freeway's capacity and accommodate the expected urban traffic requirements of the 1990s, Pitz said.

Plans call for completing the widening before the eastern I-696 extension is complete. Without widening the stretch west of Southfield, a bottleneck will occur as traffic flows off the eight-lane I-696 eastern extension onto the ex-

isting four-lane freeway.

When complete and linked to I-275 to form a beltline route around the southeastern metropolitan area, MDOT officials expect that an additional 30,000 vehicles will use the existing I-696, according to a report by Bob Kirkbride, MDOT unit supervisor for the urban transportation planning division.

THE ORCHARD Lake Road interchange is the only I-696 freeway entrance/exit to serve Farmington Hills' 68,000 residents. The other closest interchanges providing I-696 access are either six miles west at Novi Road or three miles east at Telegraph.

Due to residential and commercial growth in the Farmington area, particularly along the 12 Mile office corridor, the Orchard Lake interchange is no longer adequate to handle current traffic volumes.

"Motorists experience long delays and severe back-ups attempt-

ing to enter the freeway from Orchard Lake and 12 Mile Road. Also, traffic leaving the freeway becomes bottlenecked, causing frequent back-ups on the freeway, adding to the congestion on I-696," Kirkbride wrote.

Even though other interchanges are planned near Inkster, Drake and Haggerty roads, MDOT officials believe the Orchard Lake interchange must be improved to handle an increased traffic capacity, Kirkbride said.

A new interchange near Inkster in Southfield would relieve congestion and improve traffic flow in the Telegraph/Northwestern Highway and I-696 area.

THE INTERCHANGE would also provide improved access between the freeway and existing development in the area. Currently, access to I-696 is available indirectly over local roads, such as Franklin, 11 Mile and Inkster.

As with the proposed Drake interchange, MDOT officials recommend local road improvements.

A new interchange in the Drake Road area would provide additional access to Farmington Hills and rapidly developing 12 Mile corridor. Additional access would also relieve congestion at the Orchard Lake Road interchange.

In order for a Drake interchange to operate as it should, major improvements are required on 12 Mile. "Implementation of this plan

is a key factor in the timing of a new interchange near Drake Road," Kirkbride wrote.

The proposed Haggerty Road interchange would provide access to I-696 from Novi, Farmington Hills and developing townships in western Oakland County. It would provide access from the thoroughfare to I-696 and I-69. Access to I-275 is provided 3 1/2 miles south of I-696 and I-69 near Eight Mile.

AN INTERCHANGE would expand traffic capacity at the Eight Mile/I-275 interchange and at the Orchard Lake interchange, as well as on Haggerty south to Eight Mile.

The Haggerty interchange connection will eventually become a link in a north/south state highway between the I-96/I-696/I-275 and M-59. "The north/south state highway is part of the department's core list of projects to be constructed by 1994," Kirkbride wrote.

Currently, 20,000-30,000 vehicles currently use two-lane Haggerty daily. Because of the amount of traffic — as a route to outlying townships — and the small road capacity, backups occur at the major intersections along the thoroughfare.

Proposed improvements on Haggerty will also include a three-mile boulevard extension north to Maple Road. The extension will serve traffic traveling to the rapidly developing lakes area of Oakland County.

His eyes major road improvement projects

Continued from Page 1

The three-year road program identifies and lists a total of \$14 million of improvements. Of the program's total costs, Farmington Hills' share is approximately \$9 million. But 1 mill that the Farmington Hills City Council levied for roads July 1 is being used in conjunction with \$750,000 from the city's major road budget to finance \$2 million of the \$9 million city share this year.

VOTER PASSAGE of the bond issue allows the city to finance the re-

maining \$7 million city share over the next 10 years with general obligation bonds. Approximately \$1.05 million will be needed annually for 10 years to pay the city's new \$7 million debt.

It will be the city council's decision whether to levy a full mill or portion of a mill to retire the debt. But most likely, only .75-mill would be needed annually, Costick said.

With general obligation bonds — issued on full faith and credit of the city — city officials can legally levy whatever is necessary to retire the

debt — even if it is above the city's 10-mill charter limit.

Because of the 1978 state constitution tax limitation amendment (Headlee Amendment), the city's charter tax limit is already at its charter tax limit, currently 9.8 mills.

The 1 mill levied in July and the bond issue address only the city's share of estimated costs. City officials are planning that non-city costs will be paid for by the Oakland County Road Commission, other communities, such as West Bloomfield, Novi and Farmington, which

share roads or would benefit from improvements.

Highway grants as well as assessments on new developments would also be used to pay the total road improvement bill.

The bond issue will allow the city to improve the roads at less expense over three years than if the improvements would have been made on a pay-as-you-go basis over the next 7-8 years.

Construction costs in 1983 increased 20 percent over the previous year. In 1986, costs are increasing

about 15-20 percent, Costick said.

MAJOR PROJECTS that are expected to be done next year include constructing more of the proposed passing lanes and intersection widening projects.

Major resurfacing projects will include: 12 Mile, Orchard Lake Road to Inkster; Middlebelt, Northwestern Highway to 14 Mile; Farmington Road, 13 to 14 Mile; 10 Mile, Inkster to Farmington; and Lytle, Costick said.

Gravel roads targeted for paving

within the next year are 13 Mile, Haggerty to Halsted; Halsted, 12 to 14 Mile; and Tuck Road, Eight Mile to Folsom. Thirteen Mile will be widened from Orchard Lake to Chesterbrook.

Within the next year, Costick said, the hope is that work can begin on Drake Road. But because of its complicated nature, the project most likely would not be complete until 1988. The same holds true for the widening of Orchard Lake, from Grand River to 11 Mile.