

MDOT says I-696 'bottleneck' will end



I-696 Interchanges near Drake and Inkster roads 'are contingent on the widening of 12 Mile Road.' If local units fail to make that commitment, the interchanges will not be constructed.

— Gloria Jeff
MDOT official

By Cathy Ligon
staff writer

A Michigan Department of Transportation spokesman promises the "missing link" — the I-696 connection between I-275 and I-75 — will be completed this year.

"It's been under construction at least 20 years," said Gloria Jeff, assistant deputy director of the MDOT's Bureau of Transportation Planning.

Jeff told the West Bloomfield Chamber of Commerce last week that the project is one of many being done this year in Oakland County, where MDOT plans to spend 35 percent of its \$280 million improvement and expansion budget.

Two jobs are going on at once. The Southfield-Farmington Hills segment from Telegraph Road to I-275 in Novi is being widened to four lanes in each direction. An unfinished portion through eastern South-

field and the Royal Oak area is being constructed.

WHEN I-696 opens, "the two-lane bottleneck" will have been widened to four lanes each way, she said, and there likely will be interchanges near Drake Road and near Inkster roads.

"The interchanges are contingent on the widening of 12 Mile Road," Jeff said. If Oakland County and the communities along 12 Mile fail to make that commitment, she said, the interchanges will not be constructed. "Otherwise we're just moving congested traffic on congested traffic."

Jeff said the a study of the proposed Haggerty Road connector (from I-275 and I-696 Interchanges up to 12 Mile) would be completed by the end of the year.

A study of the proposed M-9 roadway (a major north-south road connecting I-96 and M-59) will be finished in about 18 months. Jeff pre-

dicted it would be more than 10 years before M-9 is actually constructed. M-9 would serve the corridor once expected to be served by the cancelled M-275 project.

OTHER PLANS at MDOT, she said, are to widen portions of US-24 to five lanes, improve the I-96 interchange at Novi Road, improve roadways near the Oakland Technology Park in Auburn Hills and replace the bridge on the Southfield freeway.

Jeff said MDOT is often criticized for not making enough improvements to roads, but that its first priority is to preserve the existing roadways. Some 80 percent of MDOT funds are devoted to maintaining what already exists, she said.

Jeff said the MDOT is beginning to operate more like a business by attempting to satisfy its customers, the people of the State of Michigan. One way is letting people know where construction will be taking

place and another is polling crews off the job during rush hour.

MDOT does not go in debt to do road projects, according to Jeff.

A PROPOSED national fuel tax to reduce the federal deficit is unfair, she said, because transportation did not help create the deficit. Traditionally, fuel taxes have been looked at as a user fee to pay for transportation, not to go into the general fund.

Michigan drivers currently taxed 15 cents per gallon of fuel, and the federal proposal would add another 25 cents, Jeff said. She predicted that if the proposal becomes law, Michigan will suffer in several ways. Economic activity will drop by \$900 million a year, tourism will decrease by \$260 million, inflation will increase by 1 percent, the gross national product will go down by \$24.2 billion, and 7,000 Michigan auto workers and 13,000 others in the state will be put out of their jobs.

Roll Call Report

Tower nixed; Bennett OK'd

Here's how Michigan's two U.S. senators were recorded on major roll call votes in the week ending March 10. There were no House votes.

TO REJECT TOWER — By a vote of 47 for and 53 against, the Senate rejected the nomination of John G. Tower as the Bush Administration's secretary of defense, following six days of floor debate over his fitness to direct the American military.

Tower, 63, was a GOP senator from Texas between 1961-85 and an arms control negotiator during the Reagan Administration. The Democratic majority's case against him centered on his history of heavy drinking and charges that as a defense consultant in recent years he may have parlayed sensitive arms control information into private financial gain.

Minority Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., said Tower was the victim of unsubstantiated charges. He said the Senate had allowed itself to become "a pipeline for gossip and smear, a peddler of rumors and leaks, a partisan hotbed of character assassination."

Majority Leader George Mitchell, D-Maine, who voted against the nomination, said, "Sen. Tower's finan-

cial relationship with a number of defense contractors immediately after his service as chief arms control negotiator raised serious and troubling questions about his ability to distinguish private and public interests."

Senators voting yes supported Tower as defense secretary. Michigan Democrats Carl Levin and Donald Riegle voted no.

TO CONFIRM BENNETT — By a vote of 97 for and 2 against, the Senate confirmed William J. Bennett to lead the Bush Administration's anti-drug efforts. Bennett, 45, becomes "drug czar" after serving as former President Reagan's education secretary.

Supporter Alfonse D'Amato, R-N.Y., said Bennett "has the courage, dedication and intellectual honesty that this most important job requires."

Referring to Bennett's record as education secretary, opponent Paul Simon, D-Ill., said, "I expect from the new drug czar a blizzard of press releases but not much action."

Senators voting yes supported the nomination. Michigan's Levin and Riegle voted yes.

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Indian mascots kinder, gentler

(AP) — Pressure for Michigan schools to drop their Indian nicknames and mascots has instead sprouted a crop of kinder, gentler Native American mascots.

"I don't think it's consistent with what our report recommended, but certainly these kind of steps would be supported," said Art Sline, executive assistant to state Civil Rights Commission chairman John Roy Castillo.

Sline last fall authored a report — adopted by the rights commission —

that calls for 63 Michigan schools to abandon their Indian nicknames, slogans and mascots.

Sexton High School in Lansing reacted by deciding its athletes would remain Big Reds, but its fierce logo was traded in for a softer, more human Indian.

CENTRAL MICHIGAN University president Edward Jakubauskas announced his Mount Pleasant school would remain the Chippewas under a three-year dignification program.

"If misuse of the name still occurs under these conditions, then we should drop the name," he said. "But for now, I think it is worth the try."

Saginaw Chippewa subchief Ruth Moses said the tribe is happy with the decision. "It's a step forward in bringing the Native American respect," she said.

Jakubauskas' decision follows a committee recommendation that Central Michigan retain the name if it ban Native American mascots and

drum beats, as well as start education programs on the Chippewa culture.

AFTER THE CIVIL RIGHTS report, Detroit's Northern High School dropped its image as the Eskies, short for Eskimos, and students voted to become Jayhawks.

Michigan's other Chippewas, at Manistee High School, haven't decided what to do, said principal Bob Riemersma.

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