

Inkster Road exit on I-696 under consideration

BY ALICE COLLINS
STAFF WRITER

The west side of Southfield may finally get long-sought access to and from the east-west I-696 freeway, which slices through the area from Telegraph to Orchard Lake without an interchange.

But it won't be a full-fledged interchange and the earliest it could be open to traffic is 1996.

Southfield community development director Donald Gross updated the city council recently on a proposal under review by the Michigan Department of Transportation

TRANSPORTATION

and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments.

The proposal calls for two "slip ramps" between Inkster and Franklin roads — providing an exit for westbound traffic and an entrance for eastbound traffic.

Construction of a full interchange is no longer practical, Gross said, for "economic and ecological reasons," among them current traffic patterns and the presence of protected wetlands and woodlands.

The area contains major business and office buildings, undeveloped commercial property and residential sections. A task force of property owners continues to push for the access.

"Over the years, MDOT and the Federal Highway Administration for the most part have told us, 'Show us the need and we'll consider the interchange,'" Gross said. As far back as 1967, there was a black dot on the then-proposed 696 designating an interchange at Inkster. "We think we're getting close."

Recommendations in 1986 called for adding an intersection east of

Inkster in Southfield sometime in the future. The freeway was completed in December 1989. The interchange plans have been stalled, Gross said, "but we think we've got it back on track."

The city launched a renewed effort in 1991 with Southfield staff members working with MDOT staff. Some council members and Mayor Donald Fracassi said they are upset with the delays and reduced size of the proposal.

"A slip ramp on an and a slip ramp off is not much of an interchange," said councilman Steve Hurite.

Fracassi advised against complaining too much about the proposal. "Don't give the state any excuse to deny this. If it's delayed any longer, we're going to be passed by."

Councilman Peter Cristiano sees the new plan as "a glass half full rather than half empty."

Gross said the slip ramp proposal is still under review by MDOT and SEMCOG and that nothing has yet been approved.

The access would serve the entire western side of the city. Major land owners, he said, "are concerned that their property has limited accessibility and are having a

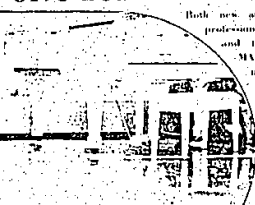
difficult time marketing it."

On the business task force seeking the access are: Hall Financial Group, owner of the American Center property, which is mostly undeveloped; Janna Realty; Blue Cross; Blue Shield; Michigan National Bank; and the Oral Heriberto office building, all in the area.

With regard to scheduling the construction, Gross said, "under an accelerated program the earliest I see it open to traffic is 1996. Under a delayed schedule with no bonuses, 2003."

Estimated cost is \$7-\$10 million at current prices. State and federal funds would pay for the project.

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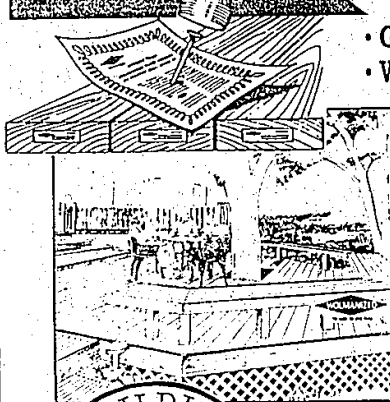
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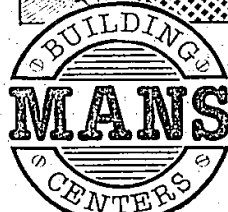
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