

40 miles of I-69 open at Lapeer

Forty brand new miles of I-69 freeway will open to traffic Friday from Lapeer to just west of Port Huron.

The longest stretch of highway to be opened at one time by the Michigan Department of Transportation in more than 20 years, it is the third-longest ever in Michigan's highway history.

"I DOUBT that we will see a project of this magnitude opened again during this century," said State Transportation Director James P. Pitz.

"We are concentrating our efforts now on preservation of the existing highway system, rather than on expansion. This new freeway closes a major gap in our freeway network."

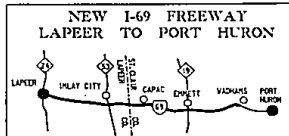
Cost of the new 40 miles is about \$109 million, with federal funds paying 77 percent and state funds the rest. There were nine prime contractors on the section, which includes 45 bridges and nine interchanges.

PUBLIC ribbon-cutting ceremonies marking the freeway opening will take place Friday morning at both Lapeer and Port Huron. MDOT workers will remove barricades along the westbound lanes and hope to have the entire freeway open within several hours.

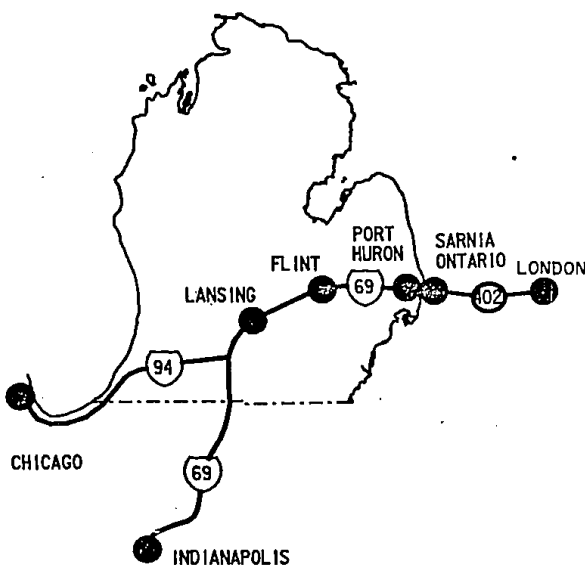
Named the VFW Memorial Highway in honor of American veterans who served in foreign wars, the new section of I-69 replaces M-21. That two-lane highway was marked by a high accident rate and frequently difficult driving conditions.

Following a route entirely south of existing M-21, the freeway links Port Huron and Lapeer. It also connects the urban areas of Flint and Lansing, and I-94, the Indiana Toll Road (I-69/I-90), Indianapolis and I-65 to the international crossing site at Port Huron to Canada.

When the uncompleted portion of I-69 from Charlotte to Lansing and Perry is opened, motorists can travel all the way from Chicago to Ontario using I-94 and I-69. Ontario's 402 freeway runs from Sarnia to a connection with 401 freeway at London.



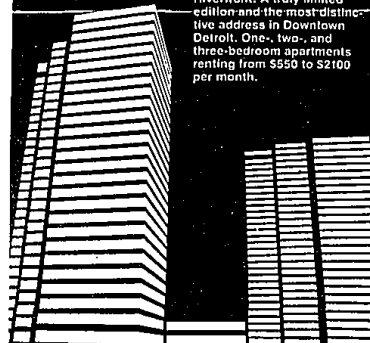
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