

East set to meet west Dec. 14 on I-696

By Alice Collins
staff writer

The Michigan Department of Transportation Tuesday announced plans for a Dec. 14 opening of the final segment of I-696 (Walter Reuther) freeway, which cuts through Southfield and Lathrup Village on its way through southern Oakland County.

The last eight-mile segment from Franklin Road in Southfield to the I-75 Royal Oak/Ferdale interchange will complete a 28.2-mile freeway extending from I-275 in Novi on the west to I-94 at St. Clair Shores on the east.

The segment between I-275 and Franklin Road cutting through Farmington Hills opened in October.

"A big celebration is planned," said Brenda Peek-Redhead, DOT spokeswoman for the opening events.

"There will be a series of events recognizing all of the people involved with the project over the last 25 years — the key people who have made this thing possible."

AMONG THOSE honored will be the family of the late prominent labor leader Walter Reuther, for whom the freeway is named.

Theme of the grand opening is "East Meets West."

"There won't be a ribbon cutting, it will be a knot-tying instead, representing the bringing together of the communities," said Peek-Redhead.

The freeway is designed as a bypass of congested urban streets and will provide improved access to the dozens of suburban communities

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— Brenda Peek-Redhead
DOT spokeswoman

that lie within this corridor.

The final section travels through eight communities: Southfield, Lathrup Village, Royal Oak Township, Oak Park, Huntington Woods, Royal Oak, Pleasant Ridge and Ferndale.

It follows 11 Mile Road from Lahser to east of Southfield Road, crosses southeasterly to 10 Mile Road near Coolidge and follows 10 Mile to the existing interchange at I-75.

ACCORDING TO MDOT, the freeway is six lanes from Lahser to Southfield Road and an eight-lane freeway from there to I-75. There are additional weaving lanes between some interchange ramps. Flush 12-foot-wide shoulders on the left and right of each roadway extend throughout the project.

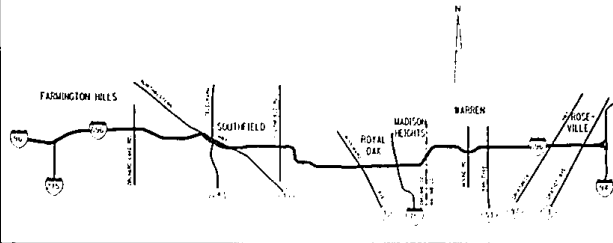
Trucks carrying flammables or explosives will be banned from the walled-in section of the freeway between the Lodge near Telegraph and I-75 to head off a fiery holocaust from which motorists couldn't escape.

Walls 25 feet high line both sides of most of that section which is con-

structed in a ditch-like design. The road also tunnels in three locations, one of them in Southfield under a large bridge structure between Greenfield and Southfield.

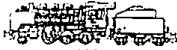
The below-ground-level construction helps to reduce the traffic noise and visual intrusion of the roadway but creates safety and firefighting problems. In the event of a major fuel-fed fire motorists wouldn't be able to escape by climbing or driving up a slope to get away.

I-696 WALTER REUTHER FREEWAY



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