

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
INTEROFFICE COMMUNICATION**

DATE: August 21, 2020

TO: Supervisor Marcelia Nicholson, Chair, County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Donna Brown-Martin, Director, Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: Informational Report – Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) I-94 East-West Corridor Update and I-43 North-South Backbone Rehabilitation Projects

POLICY

This report is for informational purposes only.

BACKGROUND

Wisconsin has 115,543 miles of public roads, from Interstate freeways to city and village streets. This highway improvement program covers only the 11,745-mile state highway system which is administered and maintained by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT). The other 103,798 miles are improved and maintained by the cities, towns, counties and villages in which they are located.

The state highway system consists of 876 miles of Interstate freeways and 10,869 miles of state and US-marked highways. While the 11,745 miles of state highways represent only 10.2% of all public road mileage in Wisconsin, they carry over 38 billion vehicle miles of travel a year, or about 58.6 % of the total annual statewide highway travel.

Each invested dollar returns benefits in terms of time savings, fewer accidents and decreased vehicle operating costs. Poor roads mean more accidents and deaths, higher insurance costs, more wear and tear on vehicles, more time on the road and less efficient and competitive commerce.

State Highway Subprograms

Wisconsin's transportation budget is divided into two subprograms for implementing improvements to state highway facilities: Major Highway Development and State Highway Rehabilitation (SHR).

Major Highway Development projects are generally the most complex, costly and potentially controversial projects initiated by WisDOT. They are long-term solutions to the most serious deficiencies on highly traveled segments of the highway system. Within Milwaukee County, WisDOT is resuming environmental and engineering analysis of the I-94 East-West Freeway

Corridor. The project covers approximately 3.5 miles of I-94 between 70th Street and 16th Street in Milwaukee County. The project includes one system interchange (WIS 175/WIS 341/Miller Park Way) and five service interchanges (70th Street/68th Street, Hawley Road, Mitchell Boulevard, 35th Street, and 26th Street/St. Paul Avenue.)

This portion of the I-94 East-West Freeway corridor opened to traffic in 1961 and is the link between the Marquette Interchange and Zoo Interchange. It plays a key role in moving commuters, tourists, freight and other movements to major sites around and beyond the Southeast region of the state. There are many major institutions and tourist attractions that are in close proximity, including:

- Veterans Administration complex
- Miller Park
- Miller Coors Brewery
- Menomonee Valley businesses, including Potawatomi Casino

WisDOT has maintained and rehabilitated the ramps, bridges, pavements and other structures a number of times in the almost 60 years of operation, but the corridor is nearing the end of its useful life. In early July, Governor Tony Evers announced that WisDOT would seek federal approval to resume a project to rebuild this section of the East-West corridor in order to give one of the most congested and dangerous roads in the state a makeover to mitigate safety and congestion problems.

WisDOT has committed to preserving historic grave sites in the Story Hill neighborhood and maintaining the current number and location of interchanges. The preferred option will not incorporate the “double-decker” design that drew community opposition when the project was last studied in 2015.

State Highway Rehabilitation (SHR) projects in Milwaukee County include I-43 backbone rehabilitation and reconstruction work from Capitol Drive to Hampton Avenue and from Brown Street from Capitol Drive. The types of improvement may include:

- **Resurfacing:** rehabilitating the surface of a pavement to provide a smoother ride and to extend the pavement's structural life. This can also include pavement widening and/or shoulder paving to improve safety and reduce shoulder maintenance costs.
- **Reconditioning:** resurfacing and, in addition, improving an isolated grade, curve or intersection.
- **Pavement replacement:** the highest type of "resurfacing" whereby the existing pavement structure is replaced with a new one. This does not include widening of the roadway.
- **Reconstruction:** total rebuilding of the highway to provide a safer facility, to improve geometrics (i.e., longer passing and stopping sight distances, broader turning radii, additional lanes at intersections) and increased traffic-handling capabilities. Other benefits include a smoother ride, reduced travel time and lower maintenance costs.
- **Bridge replacement:** constructing a new bridge to replace an existing deteriorated one.

- Bridge rehabilitation: restoring the structural integrity of an existing bridge by using fewer extreme measures than replacement—usually deck replacement or overlay.

Providing access to manufacturers, commuters and tourists within the Milwaukee metropolitan area connecting Milwaukee to other areas including northern Illinois and Green Bay, I-43 is a critical interstate link not only for Southeast Wisconsin, but the entire state. The freeway is a gateway to popular tourist locations in northern Wisconsin and links major industrial centers throughout Wisconsin.

Today, I-43 carries nearly 129,000 vehicles each day through the project area. Traffic is projected to grow another 18,000 over the next thirty years. WisDOT continues to conduct significant public outreach for all projects with portions of the I-43 construction anticipated to begin by late spring 2021.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes unless otherwise directed.

Prepared by:

WisDOT Division of Transportation Systems Development (DTSD) for the Southeast Region

Approved by:

Julie Esch, Deputy

Donna Brown-Martin
Director, Department of Transportation