



CONNECTING NEIGHBORS

MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project

WELCOME

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January 2009

Issue 8

This is the eighth issue of “Connecting Neighbors,” a newsletter designed to give you information about the MDOT I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project. It has been almost a year since the start of major construction on this massive infrastructure project. How far has the project come since that cold February day when the orange barrels were put in place? What are construction workers doing at the site now that frigid temperatures are here again? Read how MDOT is helping out in community schools. Looking for more I-75 Ambassador Bridge Gateway Project information? Go to www.michigan.gov/gateway.

MDOT's I-75 Gateway Project: One Year Later



A recent aerial photo showing a section of the MDOT I-75 Gateway Project.

It has been a year since MDOT rolled out the orange construction barrels along the I-75/I-96 corridor between Rosa Parks Boulevard and Clark Street in southwest Detroit ... A year since traffic reporters on radio, television and in the daily papers began urging motorists to find alternate routes to and from their favorite destinations ... A year since MDOT began major construction on the I-75 Gateway Project, a \$230 million dollar infrastructure reconstruction effort designed to alleviate congestion at the Detroit – Windsor border and boost the state's economy.

“We had our fingers crossed the night before the start of construction,” said Metro Communications Representative Brenda V. Peek. “We'd launched a full scale public information effort months in advance of the closure date. Our goal was to make sure that everyone knew what to expect and how to avoid the construction area right from the start. But when you're dealing with millions of motorists, you can only hope that everyone heeds the message.”

Almost everyone did and on Monday morning, Feb. 28, 2008, the long planned for project kicked into high gear. But what's going on with the project today? And more importantly, how close is MDOT to re-opening this vital stretch of the I-75/I-96 corridor?

“The real news is that the project is 70 percent complete and running well ahead of schedule,” said MDOT Metro Region Engineer Greg Johnson. “If we continue at our current pace, we may well re-open the freeway earlier than the projected December 2009 date.”

The objective of the I-75 Gateway Project is to ease traffic congestion at the Detroit - Windsor border crossing, provide a direct connection to I-75, I-96 and other area freeways from the Ambassador Bridge and improve the quality of life in the Mexicantown community by removing truck traffic from local streets making them safer for residents and visitors alike.

To do so, MDOT is reconstructing 1.5 miles of the I-75 freeway, 1 mile of the I-96 freeway along with 18 bridges and 24 ramps within the project area. This includes the signature cable-stay pedestrian bridge that will reconnect east and west Mexicantown at Bagley Avenue adjacent to the newly opened Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center.

“So far we have completed one mile of I-96 and one mile of I-75, along with three miles of new retaining and sound walls designed to minimize noise and enhance safety in neighborhoods adjacent to the freeway,” said MDOT Resident Engineer Victor Judnic. “Of the ramps and bridges, we have removed four structures, replaced two and rehabilitated seven. We are making progress on the remaining bridges and ramps.”

So as the second year of construction begins, the I-75 Gateway Project continues to move forward.

“We want to thank the southwest Detroit community and southeast Michigan motorists for their patience and cooperation,” said Johnson. “At the end of the day, this project will help retain jobs, support the state's \$5 billion tourism industry and ensure that the Detroit-Windsor border remains the route of choice for the \$115 billion annually in international trade that flows to and from the United States.”

MDOT in the Community

Everyone knows about MDOT's mission to improve the state's roadways, but few are aware of the department's efforts to help

young people reach their potential as future professionals. Each year MDOT works with hundreds of young people through outreach programs designed to introduce careers in engineering and other transportation-related fields.

At Caesar Chavez Academy, a high school located near the I-75 Gateway Project, engineers of the future got a chance to meet and quiz a real expert about the construction of the Gateway Project when Ed Tatum visited last fall. Tatum, a veteran engineer, is MDOT's community liaison for the Gateway Project and Michigan president for the engineering firm Parsons Brinkerhoff (PB).

In addition to the classroom visit, MDOT and PB staff raised money to assist the Academy in buying school supplies for each classroom and donating backpacks and supplies for individual students.

MDOT is also active at the Amelia Earhart Middle School where engineers work with female students on team-building projects and encourage them to pursue engineering-oriented subjects such as math and science. Students from the school also visited MDOT's downtown transportation center to get a first-hand look at engineers at work in their everyday environment.

On a larger scale, each year MDOT Youth Program hosts Young Engineers Day. Over 100 students from schools throughout the region come away from the event with a better idea of what a career in engineering really involves and what steps should be taken to become an engineer.



I-75 Gateway Project Community Liaison Ed Tatum with students at Caesar Chavez Academy.



About Gateway Phases 5 and 6

In addition to continuing construction on the current phase of the project, MDOT is preparing for the final two phases of the I-75 Gateway Project which involve constructing approaches to the Bagley Avenue pedestrian bridge and landscape work within the entire project corridor. These projects will be divided into smaller contracts structured to encourage locally-owned businesses to participate in the bidding process that will take place later this year. For more information on these and other opportunities, call MDOT Metro Region Development Engineer Paige Williams at 248- 483- 5155.



In addition to reaching out to students at Caesar Chavez Academy (above) and other community schools, MDOT hosts Young Engineers Day each year.



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NEIGHBORS**

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WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW?



Cold Construction

It's winter. You're driving along the freeway in your toasty warm car and out of your window you spot a construction worker. He, or she, is hard at work; bundled up from head to toe. But what exactly do construction workers do when the weather turns ugly and ice and snow make for treacherous co-workers. We interviewed Bob Jones, vice president of Walter Toebe Construction Company, prime contractor on the I-75 Gateway Project, to find out.

Q: Let's ask the most important question first, how does the crew stay warm out there?

A: The key is dressing in layers and avoiding skin exposure wherever and whenever possible. We can also head for the warming trailers that are set up all over the job site for a break.

Q: Are there specific job hazards associated with cold weather? How about any special safety rules?

A: Aside from exposure and frostbite, slipping and falling is always a big concern. As far as safety rules go, it's more common sense than anything, like always being aware of your footing to avoid accidents.

Q: Is the temperature ever just too low for the crew to work safely?

A: Wind chill is more of a factor than temperature, so when we get into the single digits, we look to shut things down.

Q: What kind of construction work can be done in cold weather and what can't be?

A: We typically limit winter work to demolition, pile driving, pouring sub-structure concrete, steel erection and some earth work. What we can't really do is pour concrete decks, like the driving surfaces on bridges and roadways.

Q: Isn't it too cold to work with concrete at all?

A: Actually, concrete can be heated with hot water and poured into forms that also have been heated with forced hot air. That's how we can keep it going.

Q: What structures will the Gateway Project crew focus on for now?

A: We'll be working on the Bagley Avenue pedestrian bridge and the Vernor Avenue bridge throughout the winter months.

Q: Anything else you'd like to tell us?

A: Yes. Think Spring!



Dressing in layers is critical to keeping warm for the construction crew when temperatures tumble.



Whether working up high or on the ground, one of the keys to safety in winter is avoiding slip and fall accidents.



The cold prohibits some types of work at the site, but the project moves ahead despite the weather.

DBE Update



Annual Conference Scheduled for March 2009

MDOT has announced that the 2009 DBE Small Business Development Conference will be held on March 30th and 31st at the Marriot Hotel in Pontiac. This is the 29th annual conference which each year offers small business owners strategic information on how to grow their businesses through working with MDOT. For more information, contact Connie Durham at 517-373-2377. Registration is due by Friday, March 13.

MDOT DBE Resource Room Opens

Are you an MDOT DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) looking for information on pre-qualification, marketing, finance or other ways to grow your business? Or are you a small business owner interested in learning more about MDOT's DBE program? MDOT has a new DBE Resource Room -- located on the second floor of the new Detroit Mexicantown International Welcome Center, 2835 Bagley Avenue in southwest Detroit -- with everything you need to know. Call 1-866-323-4009 for more information. You can also visit the DBE web site at www.michigan.gov/mdotdbe.

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