

2-year delay hits project on I-90/39

By WHITNEY HELM Staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, September 23, 2015 4:00 pm

BELOIT — There will be a delay in the I-39/I-90 construction project, according to a new Wisconsin Department of Transportation timeline.

The timeline, sent out by the WisDOT via email, included major construction on Interstate 43 in Beloit delayed until 2019. Previously that work was scheduled to begin in spring 2017.

The I-39/90 Expansion Project extends approximately 45 miles along Interstate 39/90 from the Illinois state line to Madison. As part of the project all lanes will be widened to three to four lanes from Beloit to Madison. Currently, it's only two lanes in each direction, although there are some parts near Madison where it is extended to three lanes. The project is estimated to cost nearly \$900 million.

South Segment Project Manager Steve Marshall said the department is still trying to adjust to delays.

"We're trying to get the complete picture and adjust accordingly," said Marshall.

There were rumblings in July that the project could face delays due to a proposed trimmed down budget which planned to reduce borrowing for transportation by \$800 million. In the end, \$450 million was cut from budget and essentially one-third of \$1.3 billion in borrowing for road improvements was cut. Also \$500 million in bonds was moved to the Department of Transportation.

Rep. Mark Spreitzer, D-Beloit, said there was a strong indication this would happen after the budget passed.

"I'm very disappointed in the delay. It's the result of the majority not funding their transportation needs," said Spreitzer.

Preliminary construction has begun on many of the ramps. In the spring, construction began along the Shopiere Road, including a new bridge south of the current bridge on in preparation for the expansion project.

The project would have I-43 continuing onto I-39/90 via high-speed ramps instead of continuing onto Milwaukee Road. Gateway Boulevard would be extended west to meet up with Milwaukee Road. Traffic from I-39/90 would still get off at Milwaukee Road if they want to come into Beloit. The new interchange will be a diverging diamond interchange, and will redirect traffic to the left side of the road in order to eliminate left hand turns for vehicles looking to get onto the interstate.

Just this month, the WisDOT stated it was in negotiations with the City of Beloit as well as the Ho-Chunk Nation to purchase land on the site of a future casino to widen Interstate 39-90 to six lanes. WisDOT is interested in purchasing a 20-foot strip of land along 2702 Colley Road which the city currently owns, as well as a strip of land currently owned by the Ho-Chunk. The city-owned strip is planned to be sold to Ho-Chunk for its casino project.

Beloit City Council President Charles Haynes said the delay is disappointing, particularly for those businesses in the Gateway Business Park.

"Right now, certain parts of the Gateway (Business Park) that are closer to the interchange are isolated from our Milwaukee Road business community," Haynes said. "For a business that you can see from your window, you have to travel four miles. Some people just keep going to Roscoe or elsewhere."

Project Manager Steve Theisen said the project is moving forward.

"The I-39/90 project continues to move forward with design, real estate acquisitions and construction," said Theisen.

He noted at press time there were eight ongoing projects between Madison and Beloit in various stages.

"What's happening are certain projects are delayed to meet funding allocations," Theisen said.