

INFORMATION RELEASE



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INTERSTATE 540 CORRIDOR WORK PROGRESSING IN BENTON AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES

Cable barriers to be replaced with concrete over time

LITTLE ROCK (1-31) - The much-anticipated work to widen and improve the I-540 corridor between Fayetteville and Bentonville is on track, according to Arkansas Highway Commission Vice Chairman Dick Trammel of Rogers.

Growth in the region outpaced funding for needed highway capacity improvements for several years, resulting in congestion and frustration for motorists along I-540. But thanks to funds committed by the Highway Commission and the voters of Arkansas, plans are turning into realities, Trammel said.

All of I-540 from the Highway 62/MLK interchange in Fayetteville to the Highway 72 interchange in Bentonville – 28 miles – will be widened to three lanes in each direction over the next 5-6 years. The Highway Commission committed nearly \$100 million in discretionary funds on eight projects that are widening 10.5 miles and improving several interchanges during the 2010-2016 timeframe. Then the voters passed Issue #1, known as the Connecting Arkansas Program (CAP), at the polls in November 2012. Revenue from the one-half percent temporary sales tax increase put in place by the favorable vote is funding the remaining four widening projects totaling 17.5 miles at an estimated cost of nearly \$90 million.

In addition to the widening projects, revenue from the Interstate Rehabilitation Program (IRP) adopted by voters at the polls in November 2011 is being used to modify eight interchanges along I-540 during the same timeframe. All the widening and interchange work combined is expected to total over \$300 million.

“That’s an impressive amount of work by itself, but that’s not all,” says Trammel. “We’ve already completed some work along the I-540 corridor, and another \$275 million is either underway or committed on the Bella Vista Bypass and the Highway 412 Northern Springdale Bypass. That brings the total to nearly \$600 million of work completed, underway, or scheduled to be completed along and adjacent to the I-540 corridor in Benton and Washington Counties between 2010 and 2020.”

Much of the I-540 widening work will involve placement of a concrete barrier wall between the north- and southbound lanes. That means the recently installed cable median barrier systems will be coming down as the widening progresses. The installation of nearly 24 miles of cable barriers was completed in 2012 between Fayetteville and Rogers at a cost of just under \$5 million. The project was funded with Federal Highway Safety funds dedicated for safety enhancements. The work in Benton and Washington Counties was part of about 600 miles of cable barrier installations completed, underway, and planned statewide through 2015.

From 2007 to 2011, before the cable barriers were installed, there were 17 serious median crossover crashes that resulted in 10 fatalities along I-540, an average of two people killed per year. Since completion of the barrier system, approximately 87 vehicle strikes have been recorded with no crossover accidents or fatalities. Of the 87 strikes, 23 occurred within the confines of the current widening project between Wagon Wheel Road in Springdale and Highway 264 at Lowell. "Fortunately, we'll never know how many of those strikes might have resulted in a serious injury or fatality," Trammel said.

Trammel said he is a firm believer in the cable barrier systems. "We may have raised some eyebrows by taking down some of the cable barriers so soon after they were installed, but many of the cables will be in place for several years before the widening reaches that area. If the life of only one father, mother, son, daughter, or friend is saved, then it was money well-spent."

Trammel noted that one of the advantages of the cable barrier system is that many of the components can be re-used in other locations. "I can assure you we will be stockpiling as many of the system components as possible for use in maintaining other installations around the state."

Cable median barrier systems are typically less expensive to install than guardrail or concrete barriers, and they are considerably easier and less expensive to maintain. The approximate cost per mile for installation of a cable barrier system is \$185,000. The average cost-per-mile for guardrail is nearly \$250,000, and the average cost-per-mile for concrete barrier is \$1,000,000.

