

M-6 Fact Sheet

What does it take to build a 20-mile long freeway?

- 17,350,000 pounds of structural steel = 30 Empire State Buildings.
- 20 miles of new freeway = length of 350 football stadiums
- 68,000 feet of concrete beams = length of 5,067 Volkswagen Beetles
- 682,400 feet of piling laid end to end would stretch from Grand Rapids to Traverse City.
- 124,300 cubic yards of concrete for bridges could build a three-foot column 90 miles high.
- 10,220,000 cubic yards of earth excavation would fill the University of Michigan Football Stadium 40 times.
- 225 acres of wetland were created = one and a half times the size of Disneyland (Disneyland is 165 acres)
- 8,000 tons of steel for reinforcement for bridges = 266 freight cars loaded with steel

Other interesting facts:

- M-6 was built to accommodate 70,000-80,000 vehicles per day.
- The M-6/US-131 interchange cost approximately \$160 million, which is the single largest contract, to date, in MDOT history.
- Twenty-two contracts were awarded to 91 different contractors and sub-contractors from fall of 1997 to spring of 2005.
- 800 parcels were purchased for the project.
- Total cost of project \$650 million.

History of M-6

The concept of a South Beltline Freeway was first developed in the late 1950s as a part of a plan to replace US-16 between Detroit, Lansing, Grand Rapids and Muskegon. The route to Muskegon was planned for the south and west sides of Grand Rapids; but when I-96 was constructed in the early 1960s, local and state officials decided it should be located on the east and north sides of the metro area. Later, I-196 (the Gerald R. Ford Freeway) was constructed from I-96 on the east side of Grand Rapids through downtown and west of Holland.

When the Kent County/Gerald R. Ford International Airport was relocated to its current site, and development accelerated in southern Kent County during the 1960s and 1970s, the interest in a new east/west route intensified. Existing state highways like M-11 (28th Street), and local roads like 44th Street, were becoming more and more congested. Then in the 1980s, MDOT and local officials, through the Metropolitan Planning Organization, began major studies of routing options and impacts for the proposed South Beltline.

The formal Environmental Impact Statement, with the South Beltline in its current location, was endorsed locally, and approved by state and federal officials in 1993, MDOT began design and property acquisitions for the new highway, designed as M-6 shortly thereafter.

Construction of Phase I of the new freeway between I-96 and M-37 started in 1997 and was opened in 2001 – more than six months early. The Michigan Legislature designed M-6 as the Paul B. Henry Freeway in 2001. Congressman Henry was a long-time supporter of the freeway, both in the U.S. Congress and the Michigan Legislature.

Originally scheduled to open in 2008, increases in federal and state transportation funding allowed the schedule to be accelerated to its planned opening in 2005. MDOT was able to open Phases II and III on November 17, 2004, one year early.