

The Fix on I-196 – FAQs

1. Q: I'm hearing rumors that I-196 (Gerald R. Ford Freeway) in Grand Rapids is closing next spring. Is this true?

A: That's correct. I-196 will be closed to through-traffic on April 12, 2010. However, downtown access will be maintained throughout the project, via College and Fuller avenues for westbound I-196, and Ottawa and College avenues for eastbound I-196.

2. Q: What is being done?

A: I-196 will be reconstructed from the Grand River bridge easterly to Fuller Avenue, a length of approximately 1.75 miles. I-196 will be widened from two lanes to three lanes in each direction. Weave/merge lanes will be constructed in each direction between the Ottawa/Ionia and College interchanges, as well as between the College and Fuller interchanges. The project also includes replacement of the Diamond Avenue, Coit Avenue and Eastern Avenue bridges over I-196, and replacement of the bridges that carry eastbound and westbound I-196 over Lafayette Avenue.

3. Q: Why is this being done?

A: Because it's time and it's a necessity. West Michigan has grown significantly since the 1960s, which was when I-196 was built. This project marks the first reconstruction of this major corridor. This project will meet the need for capacity based on current and projected traffic volumes in this area.

4. Q: How much will this cost?

A: This approximately \$40 million project is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). For additional information on Michigan's Federal Stimulus Program, visit <http://www.michigan.gov/recovery>.

5. Q: Where on I-196 will this work be done?

A: The limits of the project and traffic restrictions are generally between US-131 and the Fuller Avenue interchange.

6. Q: How are the freeway construction phases and closures going to work?

A: The first phase (approximately April to August 2010) will allow local access to the College Avenue interchange from the east and west, but no through-traffic beyond College Avenue. In the second phase (approximately August to November 2010), two lanes will be open in both directions through the entire project area. After November 2010, all lanes will be open to traffic in both directions.

7. Q: How will through-traffic be detoured?

A: Through-traffic will be directed to use I-96 to US-131 to continue on I-196 or to use M-6 (Paul B. Henry Freeway) as an alternate route. Electronic message boards and signs will be used during the project to inform motorists.

8. Q: What local interchanges will be open within the project limits?

A: During the first phase, westbound I-196 traffic will be able to access Fuller and College avenues. Eastbound I-196 traffic will be able to access Ottawa and College avenues. During the second phase, the following closures will alternate for shorter durations: Fuller and College avenues, College and Ottawa avenues, and Fuller and Ottawa avenues.

9. Q: Is work being done on other bridges over and under the I-196 freeway?

A: Yes. The Coit, Lafayette, and Eastern avenue bridges over and under I-196 will be replaced. Also, the Diamond Avenue bridge over I-196 will be removed during the first phase of construction. The Coit Avenue bridge work will include pedestrian and landscaping improvements to enhance the connectivity between the neighborhoods north of the freeway and the medical centers to the south. Work will be staged so that the northbound and southbound routes are not closed at the same time.

10. Q: Where can I get more information on the I-196 project?

A: Go to the project Web site at: www.michigan.gov/I-196. For up-to-date information on other projects, go to the list of statewide lane closures at: www.michigan.gov/drive. You also can follow MDOT's I-196 Twitter page at: www.twitter.com/MDOT_I196.

11. Q: How do I sign up for free e-mail/twitter alerts?

A: To receive I-196 construction alerts by e-mail, go to: http://michigan.gov/mdot/0,1607,7-151-9621_11008-170881--,00.html

12. Q: What other area highway restrictions can we expect in 2010?

A: Westbound M-21 will be closed within the city of Lowell. M-11 (28th Street) will be under construction between Division Avenue and Kalamazoo Avenue, but will be open to traffic. For up-to-date information on these projects, go to the list of statewide lane closures at: www.michigan.gov/drive.

13. Q: Okay, so all motorists have to do is wait until November and then the project is finished?

A: Not necessarily. "Open to traffic" differs from "project completion." "Open to traffic" means that the full closure is lifted and use of the roadway is returned to the motoring public. However, there are final restoration items and cleanup work that must be

accomplished through the use of lane closures. Every effort will be made to keep these lane restrictions to a minimum. The Diamond Avenue bridge replacement project over I-196 will continue into 2011.

"Project completion" is when all barrels, barricades, construction signs, etc., are removed from the project site and no more restrictions are scheduled. The I-196 project completion is scheduled for June 2011.

14. Q: Is it possible to allow traffic through the work zone while you accomplish the work during the first phase?

A: Every effort was made to accommodate this request. MDOT and city of Grand Rapids engineers looked at numerous conceivable ways to allow the freeway to remain open while the work was underway while still maintaining a one-year construction duration. Due to space restrictions on the freeway, and the extensive nature of the bridge replacements, the only way to maintain traffic in the work zone was to limit local traffic access to College Avenue during the first project phase (April to August) while detouring through-traffic. The only other alternative was completely closing I-196 to all local and through-traffic, meaning no access to the I-196 corridor within the project limits. This was determined to be unacceptable to local officials and business leaders in the downtown area.

15. Q: The Fix on I-196 has an online map with alternate routes highlighted. Will you have projects on those routes too?

A: There is no yearlong construction planned on those highlighted routes while the I-196 project is underway. In addition, all lanes on Michigan Avenue will be open during the I-196 project.

16. Q: Earlier you mentioned that crews hope to have the freeway opened to traffic in November. Are there any assurances to the public that this schedule can be met?

A: Yes. MDOT has clauses built into the contracts that charge the project's contractors \$6,000 a day for every day they are behind schedule. That is a lot of money for them to lose, so every attempt will be made to get all the work accomplished in an expedited manner and return the freeway to motorists. MDOT has offered \$700,000 in project incentives to complete or beat the scheduled contract dates of "Open to traffic".

17. Q: Are any improvements planned to the local interchanges and bridges that will remain open during the first phase freeway closure?

A: Yes. The westbound off ramp to Fuller Avenue was widened to accommodate dual left turns. The existing Fuller Avenue roadway was resurfaced from the bridge to just past the ramp intersections. Lafayette Avenue will be temporarily widened to accommodate one lane of traffic in each direction while under construction in 2010. Also, work will include the removal of a portion of the median island at the Ottawa

Avenue interchange to accommodate dual left-turn lanes from the eastbound Ottawa Avenue off ramp to Michigan Street. Portions of Michigan Street will be altered with pavement markings and signal timing adjusted to maintain two through-lanes in each direction at all times. These changes will be adjusted based on the different phases of the construction. Finally, the completion of the 2009 College Avenue interchange construction project will enhance the traffic flow while I-196 is under construction.

18. Q: What about the local neighborhood and the impact this project will have on residents?

A: Serious consideration for providing mobility to those residents went into the planning of this project. Overpasses will not be worked on concurrently. Noise and night work schedules have been balanced to expedite work on the freeway, as well as offering relief to residents along the corridor.

19. Q: Will MDOT help the public by providing information about key downtown venues?

A: Yes. MDOT is working closely with the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce to keep the public informed about downtown access. Visit www.grandrapids.org for information on all types of downtown venues.

20. Q: Is more work planned along I-196?

A: This project is funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Further improvements to I-196 and access to downtown Grand Rapids will depend on future funding. MDOT also is seeking additional funds for improvements to the I-196/Fuller Avenue interchange and the I-196 bridge over the Grand River. Long-term plans include improvements to other segments of I-196 and I-96, east of Fuller Avenue.

21. Q: How will transit and emergency service be addressed during the I-196 project?

A: Several project meetings have already taken place with city transit officials and first responders. Communication and scheduled progress meetings will occur on this project throughout construction to maintain coordination and monitoring of the various routes. For scheduling and information on transit services, visit: www.ridetherapid.org. For carpooling information and a match database: www.wmrideshare.org.

22. Q: Will local contractors be getting any work on this project?

A: Absolutely. The main contractor for this project is Walter Toebe Construction out of Wixom. Many west Michigan companies already have been busy doing project prep work, including Diamond Concrete Sawing, DVT, Give-Em A Brake Safety, and K&R.