

'Perfect storm of traffic' brews for Edens rush hour Monday morning

5-month, 14-mile expressway resurfacing project to be tested

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Tribune reporters

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With the Edens Expressway resurfacing project set to put the brakes on its first morning rush Monday, scores of northern commuters were swapping their car keys for train tickets, creating company carpools and praying for patience before heading into the roadwork and congestion expected through the summer.

Lane closings now are in place along the thoroughfare traveled by 170,000 North Side and north suburban motorists daily from Chicago's Lawrence Avenue to just south of Lake-Cook Road near [Northbrook](#) and Highland Park.

But Monday is the first time morning commuters confront the traffic restrictions in both inbound and outbound directions.

Friday was the dress rehearsal.

Jeffrey Byrne of Chicago caught a 5:45 a.m. train Friday to skirt the traffic en route to his [Lake Forest](#) office and, like many of his colleagues who are resigned to clogged roadways, plans to continue doing so while construction progresses.

"We're all pretty miserable," Byrne said. "Only time will tell how bad it really is. But judging from [Friday], it's not a good omen."

Unlike during the Dan Ryan Expressway reconstruction, no designated alternate route exists for North Side commuters. Few secondary routes are available with roadwork under way along the Tri-State Tollway from O'Hare to [Wisconsin](#) and parts of Sheridan Road under construction in the northern suburbs. Many vital north-south streets along the North Shore already are congested, especially during rush periods. Police officers in towns that skirt the expressway such as [Wilmette](#), [Glenview](#) and Deerfield said they plan to closely monitor roadways.

"What you have here is almost a perfect storm of traffic," said Bill Baltutis, executive director of the Transportation Management Association of Lake-Cook. "It's just going to be a matter of drivers allowing plenty of time and to try and see if they can utilize flex time to miss the peak hours."

Mass transit also is an option. [Metra](#) officials said they have no immediate plans to increase service along the three main lines to and from the north. But Metra would consider adding capacity along the Milwaukee District line if there is enough demand, spokeswoman Meg Reile said. The [Union Pacific](#) North Line already operates at full capacity.

Together, the two lines transport more than 26,500 people into Chicago during an average weekday.

The resurfacing of the Edens—Interstate Highway 94—is expected to last five months.

Lane closings began just after midnight Thursday. Potholes are being patched and traffic markings drawn in the right lane and shoulder to accommodate motorists limited to those lanes while the center and left lanes are resurfaced.

That work is expected to begin Thursday if weather permits, said spokesman Mike Claffey of the Illinois Department of Transportation. Drivers then will swap lanes this summer as resurfacing occurs on the right lane and shoulder.

Six bridges along the expressway also will be repaired. Like the Edens itself, the bridges date to 1952, when work was completed.

The resurfacing should maintain the 14-mile stretch for the next decade, Claffey said. The project is expected to cost nearly \$43 million.

"We're asking people to budget their time and, if they can, to avoid the Edens," Claffey said.

Travel times increased by a half-hour during pavement patching and shoulder repairs along the Edens last fall, he said.

Then, as now, Wilmette Deputy Police Chief [Brian King](#) said, traffic increased along roads that run parallel to the expressway.

"Any time there's traffic on the Edens . . . we see a predictable increase in the adjoining streets," King said.

Deerfield resident Susan Rossie plans to stick to side roads when she drives downtown, a trip she typically makes a few times each week.

"Just looking at the Edens makes me kind of sick," Rossie said.

In [Skokie](#), store manager Yvonne Kessler hopes the road construction might drive more foot traffic to the United Colors of Benetton in the Old Orchard shopping center just east of the Edens.

"People wanting to go downtown will think, 'Ugh, I'll just go to Old Orchard instead.' It might just work to our advantage," said Kessler, who will navigate the lane closings herself during her commute from Racine, Wis.

Starting April 18, the [Chicago Botanic Garden](#) will offer a weekend trolley from the [Glencoe](#) Metra station for \$2 per round trip, extending what began as Sunday-only service. Trolleys will run Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays come summer, said Harriet Resnick, vice president of visitor programs and operations.

Congestion likely will peak this summer as weekend travel increases to Wisconsin, [Michigan](#) or [Indiana](#), said traffic reporter Bill Souronis with Shadow Traffic Network of Chicago.

"As the summer wears on, it's only going to get worse," Souronis said. "Memorial Day is when it all starts."

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