

DeerfieldReview

Get ready to wait road work approaches

By Michael Sean Comerford Contributor

April 14, 2011

As in politics, all traffic is local.

"We expect this to be one of the busiest construction seasons in history," said Guy Tridgell, spokesman for the Illinois Department of Transportation. "We're in the third year of a six-year, \$31 billion capital project."

A survey of area road construction by state and local transportation authorities shows above average road construction planned in Lake County.

"We're having a very active construction year," said Al Giertych, assistant county engineer for Lake County. "We'll have 30 projects costing \$75 million, some of that money spread out over a couple years."

Local traffic

The three biggest projects in Lake County will be in Deerfield, Gurnee and Waukegan.

Lake-Cook Road in Deerfield, Washington Street in Gurnee and Delany Road in Waukegan each will see multi-million dollar projects stalling traffic.

The reduction of Lake-Cook to one lane each way could cause massive backups as an estimated 40,000 commuters pass that way a day, said Bill Baltutis, executive director of TMA, which oversees management of the Shuttle Bug program, a public-private partnership to provide shuttle service connections between participating businesses and Metra stations.

"Our roads are always trying to play catch-up (with repairs)," Baltutis said.

Michael J. Ewers, supervising engineer for the Cook County Highway Department, said Lake-Cook Road won't be the biggest project but may cause the most back-ups.

Milwaukee Avenue's work will be concentrated on the area between routes 120 and 137 where an additional lane is being added.

Southwest of that project, construction crews are adding a lane on Route 22 between the Edens Expressway and Route 41.

Barrington and Barrington Hills are not looking forward to a July when repairs at three key railroad crossings on separate weeks will divert traffic, including the Elgin, Joliet & Eastern crossing at Illinois Route 59.

"That will be a tough week for the downtown," said Greg Summers, director of engineering for Barrington which straddles Lake and Cook counties.

A bright spot on the construction horizon is the extension of Midlothian Road in Grayslake, north of Peterson Road to south of Illinois Route 137. It will result in the closing of Harris Road from Peterson Road to IL Route 137 for 90 days starting in April but the project will be complete by July.

"That will be finished by the opening of the Lake County Fair," Lake County's Giertych said.

Freeze, thaw and stall

Aggravating the situation is this year's thaw-and-freeze cycle.

Remember how this year's "snowmagedon" melted away so fast?

Higher gas prices are putting pressure on county road departments as they draw their revenue from gallons of gas bought, not the rising prices that are encouraging drivers to drive less.

A massive capital funding billing in Springfield is in legal limbo and Tea Party supporters in Washington D.C. are seeking to cut federal programs so local governments have cause to worry.

Still, Lake County has numerous major projects. A recent meeting of the TMA of Lake County, a non-governmental watch group, outlined 70 projects in Lake and north Cook counties.

Barrington's scheduled resurfacing of Eastwood subdivision is on indefinite hold.

My way or the tollway

As for the Illinois tollways, Chief Engineer Paul Kovacs said they are in the midst of a major reconstruction effort, but this summer might not be as disruptive as other years.

The tollway's \$5.8 billion Congestion Relief Program is 85 percent complete, but construction will be ongoing at some "hot spots" on the tollways.

Eight bridges, resurfacing and roadway rehab will be underway from Barrington Road to the Elgin Toll Plaza.

A northbound exit ramp will be built feeding onto Balmoral Avenue in Rosemont from Interstate 294. The longest undertaking will be landscaping improvements along I-94 and I-294, and along I-88 and I-355. The improvements will result in shoulder closures.

Lake County residents can take advantage of the county's Intelligent Transportation System, which offers a smart phone app showing alternate routes and an e-mail incident notification alert for key spots on your routes. Details can be found at Lake County Passage www.lakecountypassage.com/index.jsp.

For information, Lake County:

www.lakecountyil.gov/TRANSPORTATION/ConstructionProjects.htm

State: www.dot.state.il.us/road/lake.htm

Lake County: www.tmalakecook.org/map.pdf