

Overnight closures of U.S. 41 ALMOST DONE

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It's almost the end of the road for the overnight closures that have affected drivers on U.S. 41 in Brown County this summer, but the closure of a key local road is not far off.

Weather permitting, the last two overnight closures of 41 at the Wisconsin 29 interchange construction site will take place early this month, a state Department of Transportation spokesman said. That will end the need for the periodic overnight interruptions to traffic on 41.

DOT spokesman Mark Kantola said placement of the last of the "tub girders" that requires shutting of the highway should be complete no later than Aug. 14, but might be done as early as next week. More of the giant metal pieces will need to be installed at the interchange, but that work can be done without closing the road.

The state is widening the highway, replacing bridges and making other improvements along a 14-mile stretch from Orange Lane north to Lineville Road as part of a project that also includes major work in Winnebago County. The seven-year project is on pace to meet its \$1.055 billion budget, Kantola said.

"People from Brown County driving through (the Oshkosh area) can look at that project and see what things are going to look like up in Brown," Kantola said. "They're going to say 'Holy cow, this is better.'"

Construction of the 41-29 interchange is scheduled to be complete by fall 2014. Meanwhile, the DOT is gearing up for a yearlong closure of Hansen Road at 41 in Ashwaubenon so that the bridge over 41 can be replaced.

Kantola said a schedule will likely be announced in August and "impacts are going to start to be felt in September." Information will be mailed to a number of addresses in the area shortly, and DOT will hold public meetings so that taxpayers can view maps and ask questions about the bridge replacement.

'Advanced deterioration'

A new report on road conditions across the U.S. said one in every five miles of Wisconsin's road miles was in poor condition and two in five were in fair condition in 2011, despite an influx of federal stimulus dollars that flowed into highway projects in the previous several years. Nationally, the stimulus contributed about \$27 billion to improve 42,000 miles of road and repair 2,700 bridges, but some people say that wasn't enough.

"Considering the size of the overall investment need, the Recovery Act was more of a temporary relief than a long-term solution," says Tony Dorsey, a spokesman for AASHTO, which represents state highway and transportation departments.

Wisconsin and 24 other states were above the 20 percent mark in terms of roads in poor condition, according to an analysis of the

Federal Highway Administration's most recent data by transportation research group TRIP and USA TODAY. Kansas, Connecticut and New Jersey each were above 40 percent.

The analysis concludes that the nation's roadways — critical for moving people, goods and services — are in disrepair, and even states with mostly "good" roads have stretches of pavement, as well as bridges, that are in dire need of upgrades.

The Federal Highway Administration says the picture of America's roadways is rosier than the one painted by the USA TODAY analysis. The agency says the debate should focus on giving more weight to roads with more traffic.

Poor pavement conditions cost consumers billions annually in repairs and operating costs. In some cases, they jeopardize safety.

Roads in poor condition have "advanced deterioration" and typically require structural repair or replacement, according to the FHWA. Such roads, TRIP says, may have ruts, cracks and potholes that give millions of Americans rough rides that increase repair costs and fuel consumption.

Of greater concern: state, federal and local funding levels for road and bridge improvements are not adequate to meet growing needs. About \$85 billion is required annually to improve the condition of roads and bridges nationwide nearly double what was spent in 2008, according to the Department of Transportation's 2010 report to Congress.

The analysis also found that 11 percent of U.S. bridges, 8 percent of those in Wisconsin, are structurally deficient.

More work ahead

Wisconsin is working to keep its key roads ready for current and future demands.

Gov. Scott Walker has identified highway infrastructure as a key factor in determining whether the state will succeed economically. Besides 41, major projects are under way along Interstate 94 between Milwaukee and the Illinois border, Interstate 43 in Ozaukee County, at the "Zoo Interchange" of Interstate 894 and U.S. 45 in Milwaukee County and in other locations.

Drivers might find the construction inconvenient, but officials say the benefit of the work will be felt for decades.

Other areas that will be affected by significant construction in the near future include:

- The U.S. 41-Interstate 43 interchange will be rebuilt. The work will eliminate a significant curve that requires traffic to slow to about 30 mph when going from northbound 41 to southbound 43.

Contracts for the work will be issued this August. Meetings to inform businesses and the public about project details will be held in the fall, on dates to be announced.



- Replacement of the Lineville Road bridge over 41 in 2014.

A contractor will replace the bridge and install dual roundabouts east and west of the new span. In August 2014, the entire bridge will close for up to 60 days as roundabouts replace traditional intersections at each end of the bridge.

The Lineville Road-West Deerfield Avenue intersection will close during the roundabout work.

Bad roads

About 22 percent of Wisconsin's road miles are rated poor in a study released recently. The U.S. states with the highest percentages of road miles rated as being in poor condition in 2011:

- Over 50 percent: Kansas;
 - 40-50 percent: Connecticut, New Jersey
 - 35-39 percent: Hawaii, California: Oklahoma
- Gannett

Mason Street changes

The ramp from southbound U.S. 41 to Mason Street on Green Bay's west side is temporarily closed, but drivers can still get to Mason Street.

Transportation department spokesman Mark Kantola said southbound vehicles should exit at Shawano Avenue, continue past the traffic light at the end of the ramp and head southbound to a ramp that will connect them to Mason. A diagram of the new traffic pattern is at: <http://bit.ly/135ak9l> on the DOT website.

Because of the detour, DOT has extended the time that southbound traffic will have a green light where the ramp crosses Wisconsin 29. That means drivers on 29 will encounter a longer red light.

The ramp to Mason is closed so that crews can add more room for vehicles entering 41 south to reach highway speed.

— Wisconsin DOT