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Three years, \$115.5 million later, Whitewater bypass to open

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By Carla McCann Advertisement
 Gazette Staff

WHITEWATER-It's taken about three years and \$115.5 million to build a bypass around the city of Whitewater.

Much of the work is completed on the 6.3-mile bypass, which will open to the public after a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday at the new stoplights on Walworth Avenue.

"But drivers should be very careful," said Beth Blum, project manager with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation's Southwest Region.

The bypass will not have interchanges. Motorists' access to the new highway will be limited to intersections, Blum said.

Access to the bypass will be offered at Tri-County Road, Highway 89, County P and Walworth Avenue in the city of Whitewater.

"The bypass will be signalized at Walworth Avenue, but other access roads will have stop signs only," Blum said.

Highway 12 will be a main thoroughfare. Traffic on side roads will need to stop, Blum said.

Although the bypass will be open for traffic, work will continue on connecting the new highway to the old Highway 12 between Whitewater and Fort Atkinson, Blum said.

"Because we can't disrupt traffic on existing Highway 12, we'll build a temporary access point," Blum said.

The DOT bought right-of-ways to accommodate a four-lane highway, but the new bypass only will have two lanes, Blum said.

"We can expand in the future when traffic warrants it,"

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Blum said.

The cost of the project is about \$20.9 million more than the original 1997 estimate.

"When we first put out projects, we probably didn't do a good job of putting estimates together," said Tom Longtin, state DOT program engineer.

"Our original estimates were based on less information than we have now. As the design was completed, we understood more about what we had to do."

Out of the \$115.5 million cost to build the bypass, construction charges were about \$97 million. The state also paid about \$11.5 million for real estate and \$7 million in design costs, Longtin said.

For the city of Whitewater, the bypass means less truck traffic congestion on downtown streets and a solution for pedestrian safety concerns near UW-Whitewater, said Whitewater City Manager Kevin Brunner.

It also will serve as another incentive for revitalizing the downtown business district to make it a destination instead of a route through the city, Brunner said.

"I think it will give us an opportunity to retool and do good things downtown to attract folks," he said.

The bypass will open up new opportunities for development in both the city and Whitewater Township in the areas of bypass intersections, Brunner said.

The downside of the bypass is that some roads and highways through the city and township no longer will be the DOT's responsibility to maintain, Brunner said.

"The city will be taking over the jurisdiction of those sections," Brunner said. "We'll be taking on more responsibility."

So will the town, said Ron Fero, town chairman.

"As far as the town is concerned, the bypass isn't much of an advantage to us," Fero said.

"The only thing the town gained was some new paving on quite a few of our roads. With the loss of land and tax income, it hasn't helped us. We're actually going to be losing revenue."

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