

I-84 widening provides hope to commuters

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Commuters between Canyon County and Boise got some good news last week.

The state Transportation Board approved widening Interstate 84 between Meridian Road and Franklin Boulevard in Nampa.

It was a key step for the Connecting Idaho initiative championed by then-Gov. Dirk Kempthorne and passed by the Legislature last year.

By the end of 2010, if everything works out, we will see three lanes in both directions, hopefully easing some of the congestion that grows with Canyon County's population.

This is part of the state's commitment to improve roads using GARVEE bonds, basically borrowing money to pay for projects that will be paid back with anticipated federal highway money.

It gets the project off the ground, but doesn't solve the larger long-term problem — a lack of money needed to keep the state's road systems capable of handling population growth.

Some are exploring an increase to the gas tax. Given already high prices in Idaho, that strategy might not happen. But the I-84 work on the drawing board is better than none.

Widening I-84 is more complicated than you might think. Several overpasses have to be re-tooled. The state will build a new interchange at Ten Mile Road, which could usher in a network of commercial and residential development in the area. Overpasses at Robinson Boulevard and Black Cat Road will have to be replaced.

Unfortunately for those living in and around Caldwell, the state has postponed the Nampa to Caldwell stretch of freeway widening. That's because rising construction costs will give the state much less road for the money than originally planned.

In fact, the cost of asphalt has jumped 71 percent in the last year. Other materials are more expensive as well.

Garrity opens to change

One could not escape the news about Garrity Road opening last week. The congratulations reached a feverish pitch.

A couple of phone calls this month did complain that the new design makes it tougher for folks to turn off of Garrity on Kings Road and then take a left on Airport Road. But drivers can simply take 39th Street to get to Airport Road.

It's easy to see why the concrete divider separates Garrity from Airport Road. Airport connects with Kings only a few dozen yards from Garrity, making a hazard if motorists want to make a quick turn. It's not a country road any more.

Nampa road closures shift

In Nampa, utility work will close a few roads in areas that haven't seen much construction work this year.

Maple between Florida and Colorado will be closed starting today. It should open Oct. 31. Midland Boulevard between Iowa and Greenhurst also closes today and will reopen Oct. 27.

West Flamingo between Middleton Road and Midway Road will be closed until Nov. 15.