

State approves \$86M additional funding to widen I-84

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Traffic travels on Interstate 84 near the Franklin Boulevard exit in Nampa on March 29.

NAMPA — The Idaho Transportation Board allocated an additional \$86 million to widen the Interstate 84 corridor from Nampa to Caldwell, funding the projected \$330 million cost of improvements planned for the area, according to a Thursday press release.

The portion of the project in Nampa is in the early design stage and construction is expected to start next year.

On Thursday, the board unanimously approved allocating \$86 million in GARVEE (Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle) bonds to widen and improve I-84 from Franklin Boulevard in Nampa into the city of Caldwell. This is in addition to the \$150 million in GARVEE bonds

allocated in April and the state and federal funds previously dedicated in October. This decision allocated all of the remainder of the \$300 million in GARVEE bonds the Idaho Legislature approved during the 2017 session.

“This decision shows the commitment of the board to address a high-priority need in the state,” board chairman Jerry Whitehead stated in the press release. “Improving the Interstate will enhance safety on our roads and benefit the regional economy by moving goods and people more efficiently.”

COMMUNITY INPUT

The funding is a major step forward for the project, which was the subject of public workshops in Nampa this week.

Representatives from the Idaho Transportation Department collected community input on the expansion during two workshops Wednesday at the Hampton Inn and Suites in Nampa.

The project seeks to reduce the traffic buildup between the Franklin Boulevard and Karcher Road interchanges, said Amy Schroeder with the transportation department.

“I-84 is congested,” Schroeder said. “Anybody who traveled here today has experienced that. The community has experienced that day after day. The congestion is only getting worse.”

The department will move forward and develop final design plans considering the comments from the workshop and hold a second workshop in the spring to review the updated plans. The designs are scheduled to be completed by the fall, and construction is set to begin shortly after and will last into 2021.

Prior to Thursday’s announcement, the Idaho Transportation Board had allocated up to \$150 million in Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle (GARVEE) bonds from the Idaho Legislature and \$112 million in state and federal aid to the I-84 corridor, Schroeder said. The department and the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho, or COMPASS, are also seeking grant opportunities to continue improvements on the freeway.

A separate project the department is working on involves widening the interstate between the Karcher Interchange into Caldwell, but Schroeder said that process is still in its first

stage. The department is waiting on the results of an environmental study, a federal requirement that looks at the potential impacts of different design concepts.

The project to widen I-84 between Karcher and Franklin is already past this study phase.

KARCHER TO FRANKLIN

Doug Camenisch with the design firm Parametrix said the plan is to widen I-84 between Karcher and Franklin to three lanes, widen the shoulders and add a guardrail and a median barrier. While he said the concept seems simple, it's actually more complex than it appears.

"I keep describing this as the simplest, most complicated project I've ever been involved in," Camenisch said.

He said when the project is complete, the improved interstate will be similar to what it looks like east of the project past Garrity Boulevard. The designs involve adding auxiliary lanes on the freeway between Franklin Road and Northside Boulevard, which allow drivers who only use the interstate for a short period to stay in that far lane instead of merging into traffic, Camenisch said.

The design team is considering continuing the auxiliary lanes from Northside Boulevard to the Karcher Interchange as well, Camenisch said.

During construction, he said, two lanes will be open in each direction. There may be closures during the weekends and evenings, but Camenisch said the goal is to maintain the two lanes during most people's weekday commute.

KARCHER OVERPASS

Reconstruction of the West Karcher Road overpass, which is the two-lane bridge that goes over I-84 near the Amalgamated Sugar factory and is separate from the Karcher Interchange, is also a part of the plans for interstate improvements, said Jared Holyoak, Idaho Transportation Department project manager.

The columns that hold up the overpass are too close together to accommodate the additional lanes in the interstate's new design. The plan is to remove the four pillars and replace them with one, Holyoak said.

Holyoak said the volume of traffic on the two-lane bridge — about 8,000 vehicles per day — is not enough to merit expansion, so the road will remain one lane in each direction. But the designs include widening the shoulders and adding a sidewalk on one side.

The transportation department is considering closing this overpass for the duration of the construction, he said. He did not specify when the construction would take place or how long he expects it to last.

“We would like to be able to get in there, get it done and get out,” Holyoak said.

NORTHSIDE INTERCHANGE

The plan for Northside Interchange is to eliminate the two intersections on either side of the interstate and condense it to one intersection in the center under the interstate, which will move traffic through the interchange more easily, Camenisch said. He said the design is built to handle traffic up to the year 2042.

Camenisch said this design is unique because it would be the first connecting intersection in Idaho that goes underneath the interstate. There are others that were built above the interstate, but he said the fact that it is below won't change the way it functions.

At the intersection, there will be two turn lanes in the center that connects drivers onto the interstate, two lanes for through-traffic going both directions with a median to separate them, a single turn lane on the far side of the road where drivers can merge onto the interstate, plus a bike lane and a sidewalk on either side.

One issue with the existing interchange is the steep ramps that lead drivers onto the interstate, Camenisch said. He said the new design includes longer ramps that allow vehicles more time to get up to speed.

Camenisch said with the current plans, the interchange will not be closed during construction.