

ITD: Considerable amount of work to be done before I-84 widening

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Traffic travels on I-84 near the N. Franklin exit in Nampa Wednesday afternoon.

NAMPA — Motorists now have smooth pavement to travel along Interstate 84 between Nampa and Caldwell, but the question still remains about when that stretch of freeway will be widened.

The Idaho Transportation Board approved \$150 million in funding earlier this year to widen I-84 from two to three lanes each way in Nampa from the Karcher Road interchange to the Franklin Boulevard interchange.

So far, a design contract has been awarded for the I-84 widening project, but there's still a considerable amount of work to do before the project can move forward, according to Jennifer Gonzalez, spokeswoman for the Idaho Transportation Department.

"ITD will be working diligently through the winter and spring to deliver phased construction contracts and begin construction as quickly as possible in 2018," Gonzalez said in an email.

The interstate was widened to three lanes on a two-mile stretch spanning from Garrity to Franklin Boulevard in Nampa in 2012. The road goes back down to two lanes at Franklin Boulevard, causing a bottleneck.

Residents, lawmakers and local officials have all trumpeted the need to continue widening the interstate from Franklin Boulevard in Nampa to Franklin Road in Caldwell, but the project's costs have kept it on a wish list.

Part of that wish is finally coming true after the \$150 million in Grant Anticipation Revenue Vehicle Bonds, more commonly known as GARVEE bonds, were approved this year.

This project takes up half the amount lawmakers granted this session in Senate Bill 1206. The bill authorizes the state to bond up to \$300 million under GARVEE, a program that allows states to pay for road projects by borrowing against future federal highway payments.

The only section of I-84 that would be funded by the approved GARVEE funds is between the Karcher underpass and Franklin Boulevard in Nampa. Fixing that stretch is possible because it's the only segment that already has undergone a formal environmental impact statement. The rest of the interstate to Caldwell is also on the state's list of priorities, but lawmakers will have to figure out another way to pay to widen that segment.

Adding to the list of I-84 woes, the harsh winter opened up large potholes, leading to a shutdown of lanes on the freeway to make emergency repairs. The state of the pavement after the winter weather prompted transportation officials to repave a seven-mile stretch in both directions of the interstate. The \$9.5 million project was completed this summer.