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Coleman Road Extension Could Relieve Eastwood Traffic Congestion ^[1]

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By:

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Plans are moving forward for the Coleman Road Extension Project, which will provide a connection along East Lansing's north side under Route 127 to just north of Eastwood Towne Center. Some parcels of private land still have to be acquired for the project, but that is not expected to present a roadblock to the \$7.6 million project, which is being paid for by the State.

On February 13, the stakeholders involved in the project held a public meeting to provide

information and get community input. The project is expected to alleviate traffic congestion in the Lake Lansing Road area. The owner of Eastwood Towne Center sees the new extension as the first step in adding a back entrance from the east into the complex.

The meeting was held at East Lansing's Department of Public Works on State Road. Dan Armentrout, Director of Engineering for the Clinton County Road Commission, led the meeting, and East Lansing's Director of Public Works, Scott House was also in attendance.

The extension is planned to be approximately 4,132 feet in length, extending northeast from Wood Road in Lansing Charter Township to the intersection of Coleman and West Roads in East Lansing. The new extension will run directly under Route 127, and the majority of the westerly portion, between Wood Road and Route 127, is in DeWitt Township.



In 2006, the Charter Township of Lansing's Downtown Development Authority conducted a study [2] to examine the adjacent area to the Eastwood Towne Center development. According to a study, the municipal breakdowns of the proposed extension are:

- City of East Lansing: 1,306 feet or 32%
- Dewitt Township: 1,976 feet or 48%
- Charter Township of Lansing: 850 feet or 20%

The funds for the project were appropriated by the state legislature for this year's budget. The project is one of the largest of the one-time infrastructure appropriations in the 2019 budget, with no other project coming close to the \$7.6 million allocated for this. (The majority of projects for which the state provided funds were funded at less than \$1 million dollars.)

Many have speculated that the funds were appropriated because some of this new road will be in the former Speaker of the House Tom Leonard's district.

Securing the parcels of private land needed for the project:

There are four parcels of private land that must be acquired with public monies for this project to move forward.

The first two, which are the most consequential, are parcels through which the abandoned Pennsylvania Central Railroad ran (shown below in a photo from the project study). The owners are Chandler Farms LLC and Chandler Office Park LLC, with the principals being Daryl Kesler, who owns DL Kesler Construction on Old U.S. 27, and Patrick Berardo. The road extension is expected to benefit to their business interests, which is expected in turn to give them a reason to sell.



Private lands will also need to be acquired from Sanches Construction Company and Michigan Paving & Materials, because the extension will run through portions of their property. An official with the Clinton County Road commission described these at the public meeting as, "slivers of land near the edge of their properties."

The same official also indicated that the companies and their respective owners are willing to sell the portions of land because they think the new road extension will make getting to and from job sites easier for their companies.

For the sale of any of these properties to move forward, appraisals must first be conducted and MDOT has to approve the appraisals. These steps are meant to ensure that the owners do not make unreasonable demands in terms of the sale prices.

Prior to the extension of the road itself, the sewer and water lines will have to be extended in the area. Tree cutting is set to begin no later than March 31, 2019, with the entire project expected to be completed by November 2019.

The road will be equipped with actuated (vehicle-detecting) signals and push-button crosswalks for pedestrians and bikers. There has not yet been a speed limit set for the proposed road, but 35 m.p.h. was floated as a possible limit at the meeting.

Clinton County Road Commission Director Armentrout said, "I see them posting the speed at the lowest possible speed they are allowed to go." He explained that this stretch of road is pretty much going to be a straight shot.

Non-motorized pathways planned:

The plans call for a ten-foot-wide non-motorized path for pedestrians and bicyclists on the north side of Coleman Road that is expected to span the entire extension. The south side of Coleman Road will have an eight-foot-wide non-motorized path spanning most of the extension, but that will stop under Route 127 due to the right-of-way limitations associated with the columns of the bridge.

At the public meeting, Armentrout explained that having the wider, continuous pathway on the north side instead of the south side accomplishes several things. First, it does not impede on Sanches Construction's land. Additionally, the south side of the road is expected to have more of its parcels developed, and the unknowns associated with that make the north side a more attractive option for ensuring a path now for walkers and bikers.

Below: Photo of wetlands from the study for the project.



The proposed road is narrow for several reasons, including that there are wetlands that will be impacted. The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) requires a permit for projects that will impact wetlands that are contiguous within 500 feet of an inland lake or stream or over five acres in size in a county with a population of 100,000 people or more. Armentrout explained the wetlands limit the ability to build non-motorized paths down the entire stretch on the south side.

Citizen concerns heard:

At the February 13 meeting, roughly 30 citizens from the surrounding areas packed into the East Lansing Department of Public Works conference room to voice some of their concerns.

Chief among them was the safety of pedestrians and bikers. Attendees wanted to know how someone traveling on the north-side path would cut across over to the south side and vice versa. Attendees expressed the view that the pathways should be designed for maximum safety for travelers.

There were also concerns raised about potential traffic on the new stretch. One resident said, "I just think the traffic volumes on this corridor are going to be huge. Whatever you guys are projecting, double it because people are going to try to escape from the mall situation on Lake Lansing [Road]."

Officials are estimating four thousand vehicles initially using the stretch daily. That number could reach as high as ten thousand vehicles daily. There will be a relatively high number of construction trucks because of the businesses located along the route. Because of the anticipated construction vehicle traffic, the road will not be subject to any weight restrictions during weight-restriction season, but will be built to handle truck traffic.

A question was raised about CATA providing bus series on this new stretch of road. Ingham County Commissioner Mark Grebner, who is a member of the CATA Board, took that question. He explained that the new stretch of road is not in Ingham County, and therefore was not subject to the millage that funds CATA.

Grebner said, "We still provide services to a lot of people who don't pay us, we're happy to provide service, we just wish they could pay [the supporting] taxes."

He went on to say that he thought eventually there would be a CATA route added, but it would be in response to future demand.

One attendee suggested that there be street lights added to the new part of Coleman Road. Armentrout explained that the existing budget did not account for this.

The view from East Lansing:

After the meeting, I spoke with Scott House, East Lansing's Director of Public Works. With regard to costs, House reiterated that "it is anticipated that all construction costs will be covered in full by the state appropriation."

He expects the new extension to relieve congestion along Lake Lansing Road and provide additional connectivity to Eastwood Towne Center. Said House, "the goal from the [perspective of the] City is for this project is to provide a comprehensive transportation solution, i.e. non-motorized, motorized, etc." He is still exploring the question of whether East Lansing's City Council or Planning Commission will need to approve any portion of this project.

When it was first revealed that this project would be included in the 2019 state budget, Mayor Mark Meadows said, "it is always rewarding when our state lawmakers can set partisan politics aside, reach across the aisle and work collaboratively for the good of the region."

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