



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only.

Busy road to get makeover U.S. 6&50 to be repaved with 3 lanes in each direction



U.S. Highway 6&50 from 24 Road looking east. A project will begin next week to widen the highway to three lanes in each direction.

By Mike Wiggins
Tuesday, July 13, 2010

Long the bane of Grand Valley motorists' commute to Mesa Mall or downtown Grand Junction, a portion of U.S. Highway 6&50 will be reconstructed over the next several months in the hopes of easing traffic congestion and enhancing safety.

By the end of next week, the Colorado Department of Transportation is expected to begin construction between 24 Road and 24 3/4 Road. Workers will repave U.S. 6&50 with concrete, widen it to three lanes in each direction, consolidate access points along the highway frontage roads, add sidewalk on each side of the highway, build curb and gutter and install a new storm drain system. Workers have been placing utility lines underground for the past six weeks.

The \$11 million project is scheduled to be completed by Nov. 17. Motorists should expect some traffic delays during construction, but the work will be phased to provide two lanes of traffic in each direction most of the time.

U.S. 6&50 carries more traffic than any other road in the valley, averaging 40,000 vehicles a day, according to project spokesman Tom Newland. By comparison, Patterson Road between Seventh and 12th streets averages 35,000 to 40,000 vehicles a day, Grand Junction Engineering Manager Trent Prall said.

The nearly two-year-old Riverside Parkway has pulled some traffic off U.S. 6&50 and bought state officials time to engineer and find funding for the project. But widening the highway has been in the state's plans for years.

"It's one of the most congested areas on the Western Slope," CDOT Region 3 Transportation Director David Eller said Tuesday standing along the south frontage road while cars whizzed by on the highway.

Officials said U.S. 6&50 is the top priority in Region 3's 14-county area not only because of the traffic congestion, but the dangers associated with the highway.

Eller said CDOT has created a hazard index that ranks the safety of every state roadway based on fatalities, traffic accidents, property damage and other factors. U.S. 6&50 is three times more dangerous than the average four-lane highway with similar traffic counts, he said.



Part of what compromises the safety of the highway is the fact multiple access points from the frontage roads allow motorists to turn across multiple lanes of traffic. Eller said some of the access points will be eliminated, and with those that remain, motorists who are on the frontage road and aren't at a signal will only be able to turn right onto the highway.

The work between 24 and 24 3/4 roads marks the first phase in a series of improvements along U.S. 6&50 and the Interstate 70 Business Loop that CDOT eventually hopes to extend all the way to 15th Street east of downtown.

The second phase, which would be similar in cost and scope to the first, would cover the area between 24 3/4 Road and Rimrock Avenue/Independent Avenue. Newland said engineers are designing that project, but a construction timeline is dependent upon funding.

State tax money will fund fully the \$11 million first phase, with \$4 million coming from a fund created last year by legislation that hiked vehicle registration fees.