

Roadwork season begins in Southland

Mike Nolan | March 6, 2015



Traffic moves slowly along La Grange Road on Friday, January 30th, 2015, in Orland Park. (Gary Middendorf/ For the Daily Southtown)

With road construction season approaching, drivers who either have been avoiding or enduring the widening of LaGrange Road through Orland Park and Tinley Park know they have to tough it out a bit longer.

But fear not, as the nearly \$100 million project is closer to the end than the beginning, at least depending on what stretch of the major north-south route you're on.

However, before the year is out, another major road project in the Southland could accelerate. And this year also will see other significant road improvements progress and, in some cases, be completed.

By the end of construction season this year, work on widening LaGrange Road between 159th and 179th streets in Orland Park, Orland Hills and Tinley Park will be substantially completed, Guy Tridgell, spokesman with the Illinois Department of Transportation, said.

Work on the stretch between 131st and 159th streets will carry over into 2016, mainly because the job of relocating power lines and sewer and water pipes along that portion of LaGrange Road has been more complex than along the southern leg, Tridgell said. IDOT started raising warning flags last fall that because of delays in utility relocation, some work could extend beyond this year.

Reconstruction and widening began in the spring of 2013, and IDOT initially anticipated that the job would wrap up by this fall. Along with having three lanes for northbound and southbound traffic, the new LaGrange Road will feature a 28-foot-wide landscaped median.

Work now under way includes laying down temporary pavement south of 167th Street to 179th Street, which will be used for southbound traffic and allow for construction of permanent pavement for southbound lanes. Also, between 159th and 143rd streets, existing pavement along the east side of LaGrange Road is being taken out in preparation for permanent pavement being installed later this year.

Also, for about two weeks starting Wednesday, left turns won't be allowed for southbound traffic on LaGrange Road onto 171st Street or westbound traffic on 171st Street turning south onto LaGrange Road.

For some drivers, the end of the massive project can't come soon enough.

"I avoid it (LaGrange) whenever I can, but sometimes you can't," Donald Hart, a Tinley Park resident, said. "You can take 94th (Avenue) or Ravinia (Avenue), but that's what everybody else is doing too."

He said he hopes that when the work is finished it will be worth it.

"They say it's going to be great once it's all done," Hart said. "I hope so for all the aggravation." Drivers may also have to brace themselves for the start of another huge project that, like the LaGrange Road widening, is expected to relieve heavy traffic congestion.

Relocation of some utility lines and tree removal has been done along 159th Street/U.S. 6 in preparation for widening the road to two lanes in each direction between Ravinia Avenue in Orland Park and Gougar Road in Homer Glen. Construction on the \$100 million project is tentatively expected to start this year, with completion scheduled for sometime in 2017, according to IDOT.

Another major project scheduled to be finished next fall is the interchange at Interstate 57 and Stuenkel Road near University Park. That interchange could spur more industrial development in the area and is expected to improve access to nearby Governors State University, now a four-year school.

Along with interchange ramps and traffic signals, the Stuenkel Road bridge is being replaced and designed to accommodate the proposed future widening of I-57. A separate project anticipated to be done this summer is the reconstruction and widening of the intersection of Cicero Avenue and Stuenkel Road/University Parkway, east of the new interchange.

Construction also continues on the overpass carrying U.S. 30 over the Canadian National Railway crossing in Lynwood, which has been another logjam for drivers. Scheduled to be finished sometime in the fall of 2016, the work will also include reconstruction and widening of the intersection of U.S. 30 and Sauk Trail west of the crossing to allow for additional turn lanes.

Work recently started on bridge repairs where U.S. 30 crosses I-57 in Matteson. It involves lane closures, with westbound traffic reduced from two lanes to one and eastbound from three lanes down to one. IDOT expects the repairs to be finished in May.

Pavement patching and resurfacing is underway on Illinois 1 between Union Avenue and Joe Orr Road through Chicago Heights, South Chicago Heights and Steger. The work will involve some lane closures and is scheduled to be completed by the end of August, according to IDOT.

Road work planned by the Cook County Highway Department this year includes improvements along 151st Street in Phoenix to allow better access to Sterling Lumber, according to Frank Shuftan, a spokesman for the county. Sterling relocated to Phoenix from Blue Island, although officials in Indiana had been wooing the company, he said.

The county also plans pavement work along Kedzie Avenue from 175th to 183rd streets through Hazel Crest and Homewood, and in Palos Hills on both 103rd and 107th streets from 88th to Kean avenues.

Major work planned in Will County includes replacement of a bridge on Exchange Street over Deer Creek in an unincorporated area near Crete as well as replacing the bridge over Grant Creek on the east frontage road south of the Interstate 55/Arsenal Road interchange, according to Will County Engineer Bruce Gould. Work on both is expected to begin this summer.

The county still needs to acquire property for other planned projects, such as adding turn lanes and traffic signals at Laraway and Spencer roads in unincorporated New Lenox Township, Gould said.