

Old U.S. 131 project to improve with summer construction project

By Rick Charmoli

CADILLAC — For many who travel between Cadillac and Manton, there often is a story to tell about the drive up or down Old U.S. 131.

There are those who talk about being stuck behind big trucks and the near-miss crashes they narrowly escaped or witnessed. Then there are the bumps. The road (that term is used loosely about some stretches) is heaved so severely that it can be dangerous to attempt to pass another vehicle for fear of being knocked into oncoming traffic.

For years, this stretch of road has been in need of some major repairs, and some of those repairs will be done this summer. On Thursday, about 30 people attended a public meeting to discuss the project and ask questions of staff members from the Cadillac Michigan Department of Transportation Service Center. The project was bumped up on MDOT's schedule due to more than \$2 million that has been earmarked from the Roads and Risk Reserve Fund.

During construction, Old 131 traffic will be detoured on U.S. 131 between Boon Road and M-42. Access to homes and businesses will be maintained. Construction is scheduled to begin in July and be completed in September. This work will include pavement replacement, drainage improvements, addition of a left-turn lane at 30 3/4 Road and elimination of the passing relief lanes.

Cadillac MDOT Transportation Service Center Manager Rick Liptak said he requested the \$10 million in total it would cost to reconstruct the entire stretch between Cadillac and Manton but was not awarded that amount. When asked why the 2.9 miles from Boon Road north to U.S. 131 was going to be fixed first, Liptak said it matched the amount of funding available. "We broke it up into three segments," Liptak said. "The southern segment costs \$2 million. The middle segment will cost \$2.6 million while the northern segment will cost about \$3.5 million."

Some in attendance asked why more money couldn't be generated, and Liptak explained that other parts of the state are competing for the same money, and roads in those places carry a heavier traffic load and are in similar states of disrepair. On average, Liptak said 3,000 to 4,000 vehicles travel that section of Old U.S. 131 between Manton and Cadillac each day.

State Rep. Phil Potvin, R-Cadillac, was at the meeting and said that another \$115 million is scheduled to be released later this month and there is potential for more money to be allocated to Old U.S. 131. Liptak, however, said even if the stars align and more money is allocated, it's unlikely additional construction would happen until early in 2015. If no other funds are made available, the remaining two segments will be completed in 2017.

With the design plan of the project incomplete, some concerns about turn lanes and intersections will be evaluated and possibly addressed by planners. Also, once all work is completed, Liptak said MDOT will be turning the roadway over to the county road commission.

Full article at: http://cadillacnews.com/news_story/?story_id=1816098&year=2014&issue=20140207

