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Title: MacArthur extension to start at \$22.5M / Bids for first phase of I-72 link opened
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The first phase of a six-lane road linking **MacArthur Boulevard** to Interstate 72 is expected to cost nearly \$22.5 million, including six bridges, a new interchange, road-relocation and preserving a bicycle path.

Bids for the groundwork and infrastructure were opened early this month by the Illinois Department of Transportation. A second round of bids will be taken for paving, sidewalks and traffic signals, possibly early next year.

"If everything works out with the bid, I would anticipate the start later this spring and completion of the first phase by the end of 2008," Bill Frey, acting program development engineer for IDOT District 6 in Springfield, said Wednesday.

Frey said the first-phase cost would be paid for with a combination of federal, state and city funds. He said the city of Springfield's share is expected to be at least \$4.5 million, though much of that could be covered by federal grants.

"We're still working through the city's share, but there's a lot of federal-funds sources earmarked," he said.

The possibility of a connecting road between the south end of **MacArthur** and I-72 has been debated for years as a project that would fundamentally change traffic flow into the city.

A group of residents and business owners along **MacArthur** between South Grand and Wabash avenues formed an association last year, partly in anticipation that construction was about to begin.

The project has attracted the attention of a Springfield development group that proposes to construct a 300-acre "lifestyle center" of commercial, retail, residential and recreation facilities near the new **MacArthur/I-72** interchange.

There also were detailed negotiations to assure that the Interurban Trail for bikes path will remain uninterrupted between Springfield and Chatham.

"Basically, what we're getting here is the grading and structures for the future six lanes," said Frey.

He said he expects paving, sidewalk and traffic-signal bids to be taken early next year and the second phase completed by the end of 2009.

The long-term effect of the **MacArthur** extension has been of special interest to residents and businesses along the South Grand-to-Wabash corridor, said Jake Gronewold, manager of entrepreneurship programs for the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce.

Gronewold also has helped to coordinate meetings of the newly formed **MacArthur Boulevard** Business Association.

"The extension was one of the reasons (the group was formed). They want to know, 'What's going to happen to us?' If they start building at the south end, are they going to forget about the north end of **MacArthur**?" he said.

Gronewold said monthly meetings have consistently attracted 25 to 30 business owners and residents for discussions of topics from the **MacArthur** extension and crime to business retention and sprucing up the look of the area.

He said the start of the extension construction likely would boost interest in the group.

"One of our committees is working on just walking around the neighborhoods and asking people to come to our meetings," he said.

sj-r.com

See how it runs

A graphic showing the route proposed for **MacArthur Boulevard** is at www.sj-r.com.

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