

ROAD COMMISSION **for OAKLAND COUNTY**

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BALDWIN ROAD WIDENING IN ORION TOWNSHIP WILL EXTEND INTO NEXT YEAR

Beverly Hills, MI – The Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) widening and reconstruction project on Baldwin Road in Orion Township, originally expected to be completed this year, will now extend into next year due to weather and complexities related to utility relocation and right of way acquisition.

“This is a massive project, but our intention was to have construction completed by the end of this year,” stated RCOC Managing Director Dennis Kolar. “However, that is not going to happen. That is the reality. We’re not looking to place blame, and we’re still committed to getting as much work done this year as possible.”

The \$50 million project involves widening and reconstructing Baldwin Road from Morgan to Waldon, including the construction of five roundabouts. The project was intended to take place in two phases, with the first section, from Morgan to Gregory, taking place last year, and the second phase, from Gregory to Waldon, taking place this year. However, it was always intended that landscaping and other restoration work would take place next year, resulting in continuous lane closures through approximately the middle of next year.

However, the first phase was extended into this year after contractors locked out the Operating Engineers statewide last fall, causing many road-construction projects to stop for about three weeks. The lockout was followed by a considerable amount of rain, which further delayed work last year. This year’s work has also faced a number of challenges.

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Project elements that contributed to the delay:

- Utilities in the way of the project were not moved as quickly as anticipated
- An unusually wet spring prevented work on many days in April, May and June
- The right of way acquisition process took longer than anticipated

“This is an incredibly complex project that requires the coordination of numerous entities in an intricately choreographed process,” Kolar explained. “The construction zone carries a heavy amount of traffic in a tight area populated by many businesses. If any one of the steps was delayed, it would affect many subsequent steps. In this case, several key steps were delayed.”

The situation was further complicated by the fact that the construction zone is a physically tight area, with many utilities placed in close proximity. “The removal and replacement of the utilities must be very carefully coordinated,” Kolar said. “Any ripple in this process has serious ramifications.”

The property acquisition process that RCOC must go through to obtain the necessary land to widen a road is dictated by state and federal law and often involves extensive and drawn-out court cases. “When it comes to land acquisition, we must cross every ‘T’ and dot every ‘I,’” Kolar said.

Kolar added the Road Commission put together a very aggressive schedule for the project, with the goal of finishing the bulk of the construction in two years. “We made every effort to have the least impact possible on the residents, motorists and businesses in the community,” he explained. “We chose not to close the road, which would have ensured the project moved more quickly, because of the impact of doing so on motorists and area businesses. As a result, the schedule was so tight that any blip would knock it out of sync. Unfortunately, we then had the perfect storm of bad weather, delayed utilities, last year’s labor shutout, extended right of way acquisition issues and more. That is the unfortunate reality of this situation.”

Nonetheless work is continuing on the project. Kolar noted that while the project will not be completed this year as originally hoped, RCOC is committed to getting as much work done during the 2019 construction season as is possible.