

Work begins on a new Devil's Icebox trail entrance

By TAZ LOMBARDO
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Crews with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources began work this week to give the Devil's Icebox trail entrance a facelift.

They spent Wednesday building a concrete platform between the parking lot and Rock Bridge State Park's entry bridge.

The new platform will include a kiosk listing facts about Devil's Icebox and some other surrounding attractions, the department's statewide construction manager Mike Henson said. The new entrance will also feature three benches, a small staircase and a wheelchair ramp to the trails.

"We have an ongoing initiative to make the parks and trails more accessible to everyone," department spokesperson Steph Deidrick said. "This project is one more step in that direction."

Weather permitting, the department hopes to finish the project by August, Deidrick said.

In the meantime, park-goers can continue to visit Devil's Icebox and other areas in the park. Detour signs start in the parking lot and continue to Devil's Icebox trail, which resumes beyond the construction.

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A concrete form keeps the shape of part of the platform being built Wednesday at the entrance to Devil's Icebox Trail in Rock Bridge Memorial State Park. Missouri Department of Natural Resources construction manager Mike Henson said the new entry will include steps leading to a concrete platform, wheelchair ramp, three benches and an information station about the trail and attractions within that section of the park. Weather permitting, the crew hopes to have the project finished by July 31, Henson said.

TAZ LOMBARDO/Missourian

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

Projects will not cause I-70 lane closures

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the late fall or early winter.

Impact: Jones said there will be no lane closures on I-70 during the project, but lane shifts will occur during the construction that will lower the speed limits to 50 mph.

There will be sporadic closures of the following roads near where they cross I-70, according to a project fact sheet:

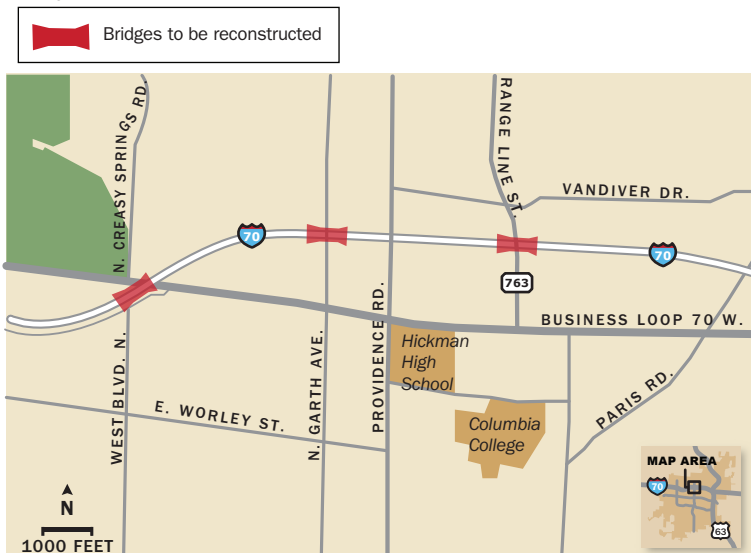
- Business Loop 70 and West Boulevard for 45 days;
- Range Line Street and the South I-70 Outer Road for 30 days;
- Garth Avenue for 20 days;
- Creasy Springs Road for 15 days.

The state Department of Transportation is relying on a single contractor for both the design process and construction to speed up the project, according to the transportation department's website.

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THREE I-70 BRIDGES TO BE REBUILT

Missouri Department of Transportation will begin rebuilding the I-70 bridges over Business Loop 70/West Boulevard, Garth Avenue and Missouri Route 763/Range Line Street starting in late summer. The project is estimated to take a year and a half and has a budget of \$18 million.



Source: MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Nixon: Keeping costs low a goal

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eligible for the scholarship, students must be full-time, in-state undergraduates and meet certain financial requirements for effective family contribution — a legal formula that tabulates taxed and untaxed income, assets, family size and other government benefits against a \$12,000 threshold. To renew the scholarship, students must maintain a 2.5 grade-point average and actively reapply by April 1.

The amount awarded to each student varies according to his or her finances and the type of school. The minimum amount a student can receive is \$300 for two-year colleges and \$1,500 for four-year public and private colleges and universities, according to the Missouri Department of Higher Education.

Scott Holste, the press secretary for Nixon, said in an email that the total appropriations for the program in the fiscal year 2015 were \$73,682,307.

"College affordability has been a top priority of my administration, and over the past six years Missouri has led the nation in holding down tuition increases at public universities," Nixon said in the statement.

Tuition at MU increased 12 percent between the 2009-2010 academic year and the 2014-2015 academic year, according to the school.

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Road widening projects would cost \$25 million

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\$12 million each.

The list also includes replacing 10 fire trucks; repairs to the fire training academy and three fire stations; construction of municipal facilities for police and snow removal operations; and renovations to the Grissum Building, where the city maintains buses, snow plows, garbage trucks, police cruisers and other vehicles.

If the sales tax is extended for another decade, it is estimated to generate \$63 million in revenue for the city — \$10 million for the 2016 and 2017 fiscal years and another \$53 million in revenue from the 2018 through 2026 fiscal years.

The Forum-Nifong projects generated discussion among the public and City Council members about need and cost, particularly the proposed widening on Forum Boulevard. Justification for the projects is largely based on southwest growth in Columbia and the corresponding increase in traffic.

Using city-provided data for 2013 as the most recent marker of road usage in Columbia, traffic on the Forum stretch has increased almost 116 percent since 2009 and a little over 73 percent on the Nifong stretch in the same time period.

The numbers reflect traffic recorded during 24-hour periods on weekdays and not on days that might skew the results — weekends, holidays or days during spring break.

Annette Triplett, the executive director of the PedNet Coalition, said the project list looked good overall, but she questioned the necessity and cost of the two major road-widening projects.

"It's not clear to me that there is traffic study data to support (the road-widening projects)," Triplett said.

Road expansion does not necessarily solve congestion problems, but it can cause "induced demand," she said.

The Federal Highway Administration's information on induced travel paints a more complicated picture.

"This term is often misused to imply that increases in highway capacity are directly responsible for increases in traffic," according to the Highway Administration. In fact, an increase in the number of drivers on a new or expanded road could be caused by local development, driver behavior and changes in economic activity.

The Forum project

The cost of widening the mile on Forum Boulevard from Chapel Hill Road to Woodrail Avenue is \$12.7 million. The bulk of the cost will be expanding the bridge over Hinkson Creek, said Deputy City Manager Tony St. Romaine.

Immediately south of the bridge on Forum is the entrance to a business complex that is dominated by the Wilson's Fitness complex.

North of the bridge is an access point to the MKT Nature and Fitness Trail and a row of businesses called Victoria Park.

Lori Henderson, a pediatric dentist with an office in Victoria Park since 2001, described the traffic on the road as steady.

She said the biggest complaint she hears from her employees is traffic backing up on the bridge, caused by drivers turning left from Forum into the fitness complex.

Along with the issue of left-hand turns, Henderson suggested a more consistent speed limit on the Forum stretch. In "icy weather, if there's an accident, it's from people not observing the lower speed," she said, citing a transition on the north side of the bridge from 45 mph to 35mph.

Overall, Henderson would like to see more proactive thought given to the effects of development before construction.

Adding lanes on a road also might increase maintenance costs of that road, she said.

The Nifong project

The proposed widening of Nifong Boulevard between Forum Boulevard and Providence Road will cost \$12.3 million. It includes improvements to the intersection of Nifong and Bethel Street, as well as the acquisition of rights-of-way along the mile-long route.

Major construction along Nifong is likely to contribute to increased traffic on the road once development is completed.

Boone Hospital's Nifong Medical Plaza, under construction at the intersection of Nifong and Forum, is scheduled to open in early 2016, said Ben Cornelius, manager of marketing and communications at Boone Hospital. He said the outpatient services provided at the plaza will include a pharmacy, therapy, imaging, primary care and convenient care.

Three more buildings in addition to the signature building under construction could be added on site in the future, Cornelius said. With space still available in the main building for more tenants, it is not yet possible to estimate the number of customers who might use the facility each day.

The Village of Bedford Walk, an independent living community for seniors featuring a four-floor residence complex, is also being built at the corner of Nifong and Bethel Street.

Other proposed road projects

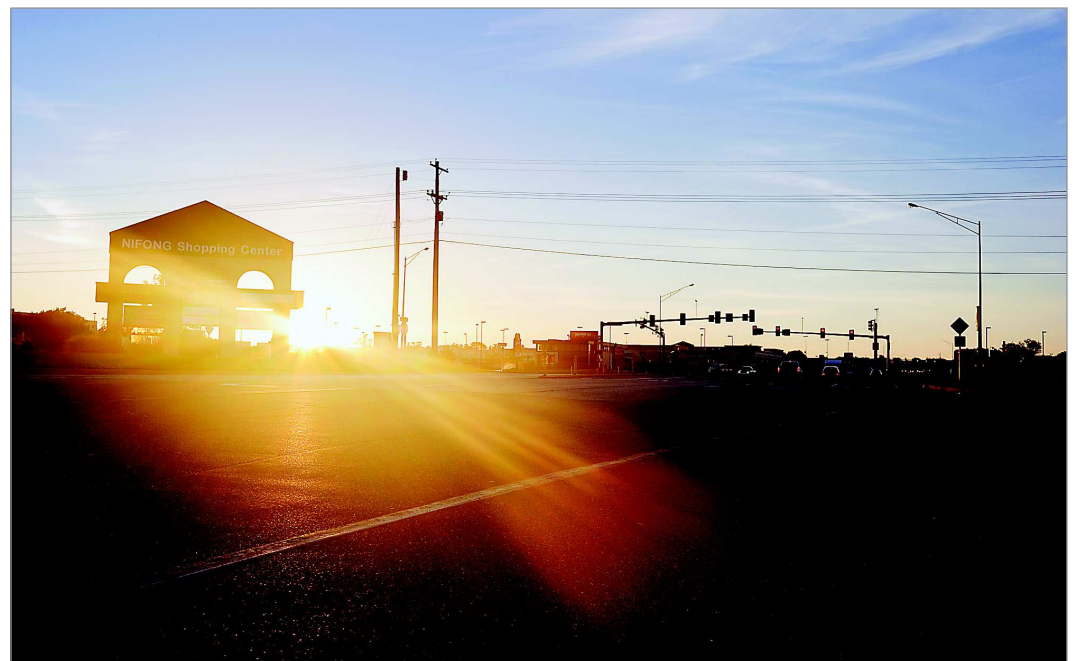
In addition to the potential road widening projects on Forum and Nifong boulevards, here are some of the other major proposed road-related items on the list of 2015 capital improvement sales tax projects:

- Removing four-way stops at the intersections of Ash Street and Clinkscales Road, Ash and Pershing Road, Ash and West Boulevard and Ash and Garth Avenue — \$2.6 million



Photos by ADAM VOGLER/Missourian

Motorists drive along Nifong Boulevard, west of Providence Road, on Tuesday. The city is considering a \$12.3 million proposal to expand the road from two to four lanes.



Motorists idle Tuesday on Nifong Boulevard, west of Providence Road. The city is considering a \$12.3 million proposal to expand the road from two to four lanes.

- Adding 5-foot shoulders on each side of Ballenger Lane from Ria Street to Mexico Gravel Road — \$2.69 million
- Installing either traffic signals or a roundabout at the intersection of Sinclair Road and Nifong Boulevard — \$2.25 million
- Extending Discovery Parkway from Gans Road to New Haven Road — \$5.4 million
- Citywide traffic calming projects — \$1.8 million

- Citywide traffic safety projects (pedestrian, bike lanes, crosswalks) — \$1.26 million
- New and reconstructed sidewalks and pedestrian citywide — \$3.5 million
- Citywide maintenance of sidewalks — \$1 million.

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