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Public gets peek at Kellogg, I-235 project

By Deb Gruver
 The Wichita Eagle

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Design of a project to unravel the tangle of traffic at Kellogg and I-235, an interchange that some Wichitans simply avoid, is about halfway complete, and the public got a sneak peek at an open house Wednesday.

The first phase of the project, deemed the "Red Project," will cost about \$116 million, and construction is set to begin in about five years.

Larry Conover, owner of Town & Country Restaurant, a fixture near the interchange, came out Wednesday to glance over the plans and see how the project might affect the business that's been in his family since 1958.

He came away a bit relieved.

He doesn't think the project will affect Town & Country until the second phase, which is not yet funded and is years away. He laughed that he might not care by then.

"If it goes to phase two, it'll be gone," he said of his home-cooking kitchen. "I think I'll be safe on this part of it."

The first phase is funded by Transportation Works for Kansas (T-WORKS), a 10-year program that's putting \$8 billion into Kansas highways and other modes of transportation.

It will provide an elevated ramp connecting northbound I-235 to westbound Kellogg and a two-lane flyover ramp for southbound I-235 to eastbound Kellogg. The flyover ramps will replace the cloverleaf loops that force drivers to weave and merge at high speeds.

The ramp from eastbound Kellogg to northbound I-235 would be two lanes. Engineers have designed the loop ramp in the southeast quadrant to be larger to help traffic flow more smoothly. KDOT says that will be an interim improvement until the second phase is built.

A ramp connecting eastbound Kellogg to West Street would be braided with the I-235 ramps, a KDOT brochure says. The Kellogg bridge over West Street will be widened to accommodate two new auxiliary lanes from I-235.

Four of five Sedgwick County commissioners attended a briefing before the open house, poring over maps spread across long tables.

"It looks like a good project," Commissioner Richard Ranzau said. "It will be a significant improvement for this area."

Like any construction project, he said, "I'm sure it will be a mess for three years, but it'll be worth it

Photos



Travis Heying/File photo

The design of a project to improve the interchange at Kellogg and I-235 is about halfway complete. The public got a look at the project Wednesday.

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in the long term.”

The first phase is estimated to be completed in 2019. A schedule for the second, third and fourth phases is up in the air. The second phase is projected to cost \$123 million, the third \$44 million and the final \$72 million.

Commissioner Dave Unruh called the project “very complicated” and said he was “amazed by the engineering expertise required to do this. It will be a substantial benefit to moving traffic in west Wichita.”

The county kicked in \$11.6 million as part of a local match for the project.

Unruh said he was glad the first phase addresses many of the safety concerns at the interchange. I-235 carries 54,000 vehicles every day and is projected to carry 71,000 daily in 2040. Kellogg carries 97,000 vehicles daily and is projected to get 103,000 vehicles where they are going in 2040.

From 2004 to 2008, there were 243 accidents resulting in 79 injuries and one fatality at the interchange, according to KDOT. Making the interchange easier to maneuver was the No. 1 priority of the Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, chaired by Commissioner Tim Norton.

Scott King, project manager for KDOT, said the project’s phases are “like a big puzzle.”

King said the first phase would help relieve congestion and make the interchange safer by making it easier to move from southbound I-235 to eastbound Kellogg and from westbound Kellogg to northbound I-235.

Eliminating the loop ramps in the southwest and northeast quadrants, he said, “will help traffic flow. We won’t have that merge and weave concern because it will be a continuous lane.”

Improving the interchange has long been on the minds of city and county leaders.

King said moving from the study phase to the design phase is like getting closer to “the light at the end of the tunnel. I’m excited to keep the plans going.”

Information about the project is available at www.235kelloggcentral.com and at www.ksdot.org/Tworks.

Kim Scheidt attended Wednesday’s open house at the Sedgwick County Extension Center to learn if her home near Maple and I-235 might be affected.

She said there had been a rumor that her neighborhood would be turned into a cul-de-sac, but she said engineers told her it looked like they would only need a corner of her property.

“I’m fine with that,” she said.

Her parents owned the home since 1964, and Scheidt, who now lives there, has lived there all her life.

She doesn’t use the interchange much.

“As it is now, we don’t use Maple much because it’s too hard to get out, so we just take Douglas,” she said.

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