

Evers administration moving ahead with I-94 East-West expansion plan

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DOT Secretary Craig Thompson said it will likely be a year to 18 months before the state could get federal approval to put the long-delayed I-94 East-West expansion back in the pipeline.

That would then mean putting the project in the 2023-25 budget.

Gov. Tony Evers and Thompson announced yesterday the administration is moving ahead with plans to reconstruct the 3.5-mile stretch of interstate between the Zoo and Marquette interchanges in Milwaukee County.

Then-Gov. Scott Walker abandoned the plan in 2017 amid rising costs and a crunch of transportation dollars.

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Thompson told WisPolitics.com getting the project moving again will require a series of steps, including new environmental studies and traffic analysis. Still, he said the department is focused on an option that has already been identified.

The timeline for federal approval also would dovetail with other interstate work in southeastern Wisconsin, Thompson said. The department has finished work on I-94 North-South in the Racine County area and expects to complete the north leg of the Zoo Interchange in the 2021-23 biennium.

Thompson said 94 North-West would be a natural progression.

“This is a long-term plan,” he told WisPolitics.com.

The project ran into opposition in the past over costs, particularly as double decking

the interstate was considered. There have also been concerns about an expansion disturbing graves at a cemetery that sits on both sides of the interstate near Miller Park.

Thompson said the agency has ruled out double decking the interstate and is moving ahead with a previously identified alternative. That option would expand the interstate to eight lanes. But those lanes would narrow near the cemetery to avoid disturbing any graves. The project also wouldn't reduce the number of interchanges, a concern from suburban leaders about past proposals.

The preferred option was estimated to cost \$852 million in 2014. Thompson said the agency was still working on a new cost estimate that would account for various changes in the project. He also said the state expects the federal government would pick up a "significant" portion of the cost.

The announcement was praised by suburban GOP lawmakers and various groups that pointed out the 60-year-old interstate is one of the most congested in the state.

Robb Kahl, executive director of the Construction Business Group, said the work will be a shot in the arm for the state's economy.

"The 10,000 jobs necessary to complete the project will help pull us out of an economic slump all while creating opportunities for further economic investment in the region in the coming years," Kahl said.

Still, state Rep. Daniel Riemer, D-Milwaukee, questioned the need for the project. Riemer, who also was a critic of the proposal under the Walker administration, tweeted today, "Billion dollar freeway expansion without a plan to fix local roads = bad transportation policy. Hey @WisconsinDOT, it's not 1960 anymore."

See the Evers administration announcement [here](#).

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