

# Major road project eases congestion in Boerne

By Zeke MacCormack

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BOERNE — Mike Coyne is already a regular on the new Herff Road, a 1.2-mile parkway on which traffic began flowing Tuesday between Texas 46 east of town and U.S. 87, also called South Main Street, near Interstate 10.

“I’ve been on it every day since it opened once, if not twice. It’s a lot easier,” said Coyne, 66, who takes the thoroughfare to reach his job on the westbound I-10 frontage road here from his home out FM 474 north of town.

The bypass won’t cure the twice-daily gridlock experienced by many commuters in this fast-growing community, but is seen as providing some relief to congestion, especially downtown.

It also creates about a mile of prime roadside parcels for commercial development in South Boerne, known as “SoBo.”

“The traffic problem has really been getting pretty critical out here,” said Coyne, 66. “It’s gotten a lot worse since I got here in 2003.”

Construction began in 2013 on the two-phase road project that ranks as Kendall County’s most costly, at roughly \$12 million.

The first phase involved straightening and widening to four lanes the old stretch of Herff Road between Texas 46 and Old San Antonio Road, where it terminated.

The second phase - known as the Herff Road Extension - involved building a 2,000-foot long parkway across raw land from Old San Antonio Road to connect with South Main Street.

Completion of first phase by J3 Co. was slowed rain delays and other complications, but work on the second stretch, by Capital Excavation, is now wrapping up on time.

“I’m glad that it’s open and I look forward to it being a good transportation avenue for the people of the county,” County Judge Darrel Lux said Friday.

Signal lights at the intersection of Herff Road and South Main Street are on flash mode while a traffic study was conducted this week, County Engineer Rick Tobolka said, predicting they will be programmed and operational by Tuesday.

Besides the regular sounding of horns by frustrated drivers trying to navigate the blinking lights this week, laborers on the project said they’ve gotten plenty of happy toots and thumbs up from drivers enjoying the fresh stretch of pavement.

“People like it,” Ruben Lopez said as he and other Capital Excavation workers put concrete around a roadside drain pipe on Friday.

Count Scott Hammock among the fans.

“It’s awesome. Much appreciated that it’s here,” Hammock, 41, said while whizzing down the largely vacant parkway Friday on a motorcycle. “I use it now every day.”

Kendall County Auditor Corinna Speer said \$11.8 million has been spent to date on the project, with some bills yet to be paid.

Although county voters approved issuing \$10 million in bonds in 2011 to fund it, she said only \$7.5 million worth were issued, supplemented by cash from county reserves.

A \$2.3 million contribution came from the Lookout Group, the developer of the Esperanza subdivision off Texas 46, as called for to mitigate its traffic impact under a 2007 development agreement with the city.

The work was closely coordinated with the city, which Deputy City Manager Jeff Thompson said spent \$250,000 to support the project with in-kind services.

He welcomed the road's long-awaited opening, saying, "The goal was to take traffic from Hwy 46 to IH 10, and vice versa, without passing through downtown."

Thompson said city planners already are working on a new city road that would allow vehicles on Herff Road to cross South Main Street to access a new westbound frontage road on Interstate 10 that the state is building between exits 542 (U.S. 87) and 541 (Texas 46).

As the new roads are built, development is likely to follow, said Misty Mayo, president of the Boerne Kendall County Economic Development Corp.

She called the Herff Road project "wonderful" from an economic development perspective, saying, "It gives us new opportunities to attract the commercial businesses the community desires."

But some fear more development will create more traffic and commuting headaches.

"The traffic problem has really been getting pretty critical out here," said Coyne, who'd prefer the land bordering the new parkway remain vacant. "It's gotten a lot worse since I got here in 2003."

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