

THE Messenger

NEWS

Bids for U.S. 20 to get show on road

Grading deadline is end of 2008

By BILL SHEA, Messenger staff writer

SAC CITY – Talk about building the next four-lane section of U.S. Highway 20 will shortly give way to the rumble of heavy machinery actually doing the job.

The Iowa Department of Transportation is scheduled to open bids next week for earthmoving on a section of the route in Calhoun and Webster counties, an official said Friday.

DOT District Engineer Rich Michaelis said the work could start four to six weeks after that.

He said the work, called grading, must be done by the end of next year.

While grading will be done for four lanes, just two of them will be paved at first. Michaelis said the paving will be done in 2010. Getting the other two lanes paved will depend on the money available in the future, he added.

He briefed members of the U.S. 20 Corridor Association on the next steps in the decades long quest to widen the highway to four lanes all across Iowa.

U.S. Highway 20 crosses the state between Dubuque and Sioux City. After years of work, about 90 miles between Moorland and Merville in Woodbury County are all that remain to be widened. Finishing the job is expected to cost about \$500 million.

The next section to be addressed is between Iowa Highway 4 in Calhoun County and Moorland. Michaelis said for construction purposes that 21-mile segment is being divided into different pieces.

He said the first contract to be awarded will cover the section between Calhoun County road N65, two miles east of Rockwell City, and the border of Webster and Calhoun counties.

Next month, he said, contracts will be awarded for the work between Moorland and the county border, and between Calhoun County road N65 and Iowa Highway 4, which is just west of Rockwell City.

The new four-lane section will be north of the current highway. It will bypass Rockwell City.

In another highway matter, state Rep. Rod Roberts, R-Carroll, said he expects the difference in registration fees between pickups and other vehicles will be examined in the search for more highway money.

“I’d be very surprised if that issue isn’t addressed in some way,” he told association members. “Its time may have come.”

Pickup owners pay \$65 a year for their registrations. Owners of cars and light trucks pay fees based on the age and weight of the vehicles. Often, those fees are much higher than \$65. The lower fee for pickups is a leftover from days past when farmers were about the only people who had them.

Roberts is a member of a special committee that will meet this fall to consider ways of raising money for a new highway account called TIME-21. That's an acronym for Transportation Investment Moves the Economy in the 21st Century.

State Rep. David Tjepkes, R-Gowrie, is also a member of that panel.

Roberts said the group will meet at least twice before submitting recommendations to the Legislature next year.

Contact Bill Shea at (515) 573-2141 Or bshea@messengernews.net

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