

Work on I-70/I-435 interchange starts today

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By BRAD COOPER
The Kansas City Star

The interchange at Interstates 70 and 435 mixes a nasty brew of congestion and crashes for thousands of area drivers.

It's blamed for daily traffic backups and delays. It had more crashes last year than any other place in Kansas City.

Starting today, highway crews will go to battle against this traffic monster with a \$39 million project to add a third through lane on I-70 at I-435.

It's one of the biggest road projects in the metro area that received federal stimulus money approved last year.

Also in store for the roughly 200,000 drivers who use the interchange each day:

■ A new half-interchange at I-435 and U.S. 40.

■ Replacement of the Blue Ridge Cutoff bridge — also known as the George Brett Bridge — over I-70.

■ Overhaul of the ramps at

Fixing an East Side bottleneck

Where: I-70 and I-435
Cost: \$39.3 million
Completion: Late 2011



1. Add a third through lane on I-70 in each direction under I-435.

Why: Traffic backs up now when one lane becomes an exit ramp, squeezing non-exiting traffic into two lanes.

2. Reconfigure the ramp from northbound I-435 to eastbound I-70, with a direct connection to Blue Ridge Cutoff.

Why: I-435 motorists can reach the cutoff without exiting at I-70 first. Keeps some stadium traffic off I-70.

3. Reconfigure ramps at I-70 and U.S. 40.

Why: Provides access in all directions to U.S. 40 from I-70.

4. Replace the George Brett Bridge (Blue Ridge Cutoff) over I-70.

Why: Accommodates the new I-70 lanes and ramps.

5. Add a half-diamond interchange at I-435 and U.S. 40.

Why: Improves access to U.S. 40 and Manchester Trafficway from the north.

Source: Missouri Department of Transportation

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I-70 and U.S. 40 to the west to provide a left-turn option at the bottom of the I-70 exit ramp to U.S. 40.

■ A new ramp directly connecting drivers from northbound I-435 to Blue Ridge Cutoff and the Truman Sports

Complex.

The project is the first of many costly steps that will be needed to overhaul the inter-

change, which serves not only as a major commuting portal, but also helps Chiefs and Royals fans get to the sports complex to the east.

Overall, fixing the interchange to relieve congestion is expected to cost about \$280 million, rivaling what was spent to rebuild the Triangle, now known as the Three Trails Crossing, a couple of years ago.

Engineers say the traffic impacts should be nominal at first since a lot of the heavy lifting isn't expected to begin until after the Chiefs' season ends and work can start on a new bridge over I-70.

Drivers on I-435 can expect some lane closures, mostly from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., where a new half-interchange is being constructed at U.S. 40.

The biggest impacts probably will be felt when highway crews demolish the U.S. 40

bridge over I-435 in June and when the Brett Bridge comes down next year.

In both cases, the interstates will be closed, most likely at nights and on weekends.

Contractors will be under a tight timeline to get the Brett Bridge done. They will have spent to rebuild the Chiefs' home season is done — possibly in December — until the Royals' home season starts in 2011 or face \$81,000 a day in damages.

Drivers won't see work on I-70 until early spring of 2011 when the third lane is built.

The interchange is one of the more notorious ones in the metro area. There were 107 wrecks there last year, 42 percent more than the next worst Kansas City interchange, at I-435 and Front Street.

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