

Smoother traffic, fewer crashes

Written by Staff Reports
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NMDOT presents zipper merge

In an effort to cut the number of collisions as construction work resumes on five projects along I-40 in McKinley and Cibola counties, District 6 of the New Mexico Department of Transportation has introduced the “zipper merge.”

NMDOT says most New Mexico motorists start to merge in construction zones as soon as they see warning signs and learn which lane ahead is closed. This is called an “early merge” and it can lead to dangerous lane switching, inconsistent driving speeds that cause crashes, long back-ups that block interchanges, angry drivers and road rage.

Research shows, however, that these dangers decrease and traffic moves more smoothly using the zipper merge.

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The zipper merge occurs when motorists use both lanes until they reach the defined merge area and then alternate into the open lane.

The zipper merge reduces speed differences between lanes and reduces the overall length of a traffic backup by as much as 40 percent. It also creates a sense of fairness since all lanes are moving at the same pace.

In order for the zipper merge to work, both lanes approaching the construction zone should be used by motorists. As you see the “lane closed ahead” sign and traffic backing up, stay in your current lane up to the point of the merge. Then take turns with other drivers to safely and smoothly ease into the remaining lane.

To see how zipper merge works, go to ZipperMergeNM.com for an animated video demonstration.

THE FIVE CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

- In McKinley County a \$16.4 million roadway reconstruction project near Ciniza Refinery has been awarded to FNF Construction, Inc., of Tempe, Ariz. This project is in the last of three phases. It will include reconstruction of both lanes of east and westbound I-40, installation of new guardrail and concrete wall barrier, new signage and striping.

Traffic impacts include:

All traffic will be detoured through a median crossover while work begins on the westbound lanes. There is one lane open to traffic in each direction. Speed will be reduced to 55 miles per hour with an 11-foot width restriction.

- West of Gallup there is a \$6.1 million metal guardrail installation project along I-40 from To'hajiilee to the Port of Entry. Awarded to J-H Supply of Albuquerque, the project includes

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replacement and upgrade of new metal guardrail and concrete wall barrier at various locations in McKinley and Cibola counties.

- A \$5.8 million metal guardrail installation project from Gallup to Ciniza Refinery was awarded to Valley Fence Company of Albuquerque. This project also includes replacement and upgrade of new metal guardrail and concrete wall barrier at locations not included in the previous project.

Impacts from both of these projects include:

- Single lane closures will be set up in both directions.
 - Speed will be reduced to 55 miles per hour with a 12-foot width restriction.
 - A \$14.6 million roadway reconstruction project between Prewitt and Thoreau in McKinley County was awarded to FNF Construction, Inc., of Tempe, Ariz. This project will include reconstruction of both lanes of east and westbound I-40, construction of new concrete wall barrier and drainage improvements.
- Traffic impacts include:
- All traffic will be detoured through a median crossover while work begins on the eastbound lanes. There will be one lane open to traffic in each direction. Speed will be reduced to 55 miles per hour with a 12-foot width restriction.
 - In Cibola County a \$24.6 million roadway reconstruction and bridge/ramp rehabilitation project near Laguna was awarded to Mountain States Constructors, Inc., of Albuquerque. The project will include reconstruction of both lanes of east and westbound I-40, rehabilitation of the bridge and ramps and Exit 114, installation of new guardrail and median concrete wall barrier, new signage and striping.

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Traffic impacts include:

- Traffic will be detoured through a median crossover during work on the eastbound lanes. There will be two lanes open for westbound traffic and one lane for eastbound traffic.

For more information on road conditions, visit nmroads.com.