

Summary: The roadway will benefit the **Clackamas Town Center** area

A new Interstate 205 interchange 1.5 miles north of heavily used Southeast Sunnyside Road is expected to open about Nov. 1 and provide quick relief for the congested **Clackamas Town Center** area.

Two years in the making, the \$3.94 million project originally was known as the Lester Avenue interchange. However, the state Highway Division has renamed it the Johnson Creek Boulevard interchange.

The reason for the new name is a second phase of the project, a \$1.57 million connection of Southeast Johnson Creek Boulevard to the interchange site.

“There actually will be no more Lester Avenue once the project is completed,” said Earl Mershon, Highway Division project manager. “Lester will become Johnson Creek Boulevard.”

Mershon said weather will be the key to any Nov. 1 interchange opening.

“If it rains a lot between now and then, we could face some delay,” he added.

Highway Division officials are confident the new interchange and the vast road improvement work surrounding it will greatly reduce traffic pressure on the I-205-Sunnyside Road interchange to the south.

The Sunnyside Road interchange leads to the **Clackamas Town Center** and **Clackamas Promenade** shopping centers to the west and new shopping malls, housing developments and Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center to the east.

On an average day, about 45,000 cars heading north or south on I-205 use the Sunnyside Road interchange, according to Tom Schwab, the Highway Division's transportation analysis manager.

“With the advent of the Johnson Creek Boulevard interchange, we expect that number to be reduced between 20 percent to 30 percent,” Schwab said. “It should also mean a slight traffic reduction for the Foster Road interchange just north of the new one.”

These reductions, he said, will mean considerably fewer traffic headaches for residents of the Sunnyside and Happy Valley areas.

The first phase of work on the Johnson Creek Boulevard interchange project began in May 1988. It included not only the interchange itself, but street improvements between Southeast Fuller Road and Southeast 92nd Avenue, and construction of a new street -- Southeast 91st Avenue -- for a two-block area from Lester Avenue south to Con Battin Road.

The major portion of the second phase work, which began last April, consisted of the extension of Johnson Creek Boulevard eastward to Fuller Road to connect with the new interchange area.

The second phase included the widening of Johnson Creek Boulevard for several blocks west of Southeast 82nd Avenue. It also involved widening and improving 82nd Avenue two blocks north and two blocks south of the intersection of 82nd and Johnson Creek Boulevard.

Because the entire project is considered an interstate highway improvement, the federal government picked up more than 90 percent of the cost.

However, farther south on I-205, where **Clackamas** County officials are pushing for a new improvement project in the Sunnyside Road interchange area, the county would be expected to share at least half of the improvement cost.

Called the Sunnybrook project, the county proposal would involve modifying the Sunnyside Road interchange into a so-called split diamond interchange. There also would be a freeway overpass for Southeast Sunnybrook Drive just south of the interchange.

A second phase of the proposed project calls for Sunnybrook Drive to be extended east of the freeway behind Kaiser Sunnyside Medical Center and then north to connect with Sunnyside Road at either Southeast 108th Avenue or at Valley View Terrace.

The county has completed a preliminary draft of an environmental impact statement for the proposal, and held a public hearing on it in July. County planners are completing a hearing study report for the county commissioners.

If the study report wins board approval later this year, planners will finalize the environmental impact statement for presentation to commissioners next spring.

State highway officials have kept an eye on the Springbrook project but are not expected to become involved until a final environmental impact statement is approved by the county. This would then go to the state Highway Division and Federal Highway Authority for a final decision.

The Springbrook proposal is on the Highway Division's six-year improvement plan -- but only for funds for early planning and preliminary engineering work.

Whether construction takes place would depend on the county's ability to come up with funds to pay for half the project's costs, presently estimated at the \$18 million to \$21 million level. Of that, about \$13 million would be for just the interchange work.

Schwab said county officials see the Sunnybrook project as another way to relieve Sunnyside Road-area traffic, but Highway Division officials do not view the project the same way.

"The Sunnybrook project would merely redistribute traffic in the area," Schwab said. "The traffic will remain in the area -- unlike the new Johnson Creek Boulevard interchange, which gives motorists a number of viable options to avoid the Sunnyside Road area."

Some area residents who opposed the Springbrook project at the recent hearing contended it would only result in residential streets becoming clogged with more vehicles.

Highway officials such as James McClure, the division's project development director, question whether the Springbrook project is aimed more at serving the interests of Sunnyside-area commercial and residential builders rather than the traveling I-205 public.

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