



SPORTS

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expansion at a standstill

Potential developments desire expressway

desire four-lane access to Omaha and/or the interstate.

The first two phases, from Columbus to Rogers and Fremont to Omaha, of the Highway 30 expressway have been completed, and despite the inclusion of the final two phases in the state's 2002 six-year highway project plan, the final two

phases, a 5.2-mile stretch from Rogers to North Bend and the 14.5 miles from North Bend to Fremont, are stalled.

Noyes Rogers, a former member of the Columbus Area Chamber of Commerce Transportation Committee, cites a singular community focus, Nebraska Department of

Roads (NDOR) district boundaries and a lack of support from any community east of Schuyler as primary reasons the approximately 20 miles between Rogers and Fremont remain unimproved.

Lobbying for the expansion of U.S. Highway 30 to a four-lane expressway between Columbus and

Omaha began more than 10 years ago, Rogers said, but prior efforts were necessary for the full project to be completed.

Rogers, who was involved with committee during the mid-1960s, provided some background on the subject, stating the Columbus community was focused primarily on the development of U.S. Highway 81, perhaps to a fault.

■ See EXPANSION, Page 2A

96-FEET DOWN



Cramer & Associates workers lower a 37,000 pound, 96-foot-long rebar cage into a 10-foot-diameter hole drilled by Longfellow Drilling, starting late Thursday night until completion Friday. The cage is the largest support structure ever constructed by Cramer & Associates. Concrete was poured non-stop until the main pier structure to support part of the new 33rd Avenue viaduct was completed.

**Photos by
Eric Freeman**



The four lanes of U.S. Highway 30 going east from Columbus merge into only two a few miles east of Schuyler going east to North Bend and Fremont.

Expansion

Continued from Page 1A

"Columbus was pushing to develop the Highway 81 corridor," the local attorney and community leader said, "possibly ignoring Highway 30."

During the late-1960s, two Highway 81 route proposals were presented to the Columbus area — one that would take a more southerly direction passing east of Monroe and another that would dip southeast through Columbus.

Rogers said at the time Columbus' biggest concern was increasing traffic flow through the community and the development of Highway 81 through town was a way to do that.

Attention was further focused on Highway 81 as Columbus worked to rebuild 23rd Street and 33rd Avenue as four-lane roads to accommodate the increased volume of traffic, he said, which was completed in the mid-70s.

"For at least 15-20 years all the effort of the community went to developing Highway 81," which was a great benefit to the Columbus area, Rogers said, but perhaps at the expense of future devel-

opment of Highway 30.

During the 1980s, a plan to construct an expressway system was being devised, which led to the 1988 expressway plan. The plan was to connect communities with populations of 15,000 or greater to Interstate 80 via a four-lane highway by 2003, but, to date, only 421 miles of the original 600-mile system have been completed.

Rogers said expansion of Highway 30 from Columbus to Schuyler to Fremont was placed low, if not the lowest, on the priority list of segments to be completed.

"We should have been pushing so it was not on the lowest rung," he said.

Despite the low priority, Rogers said the NDOR District 3 office out of Norfolk was very helpful in getting Highway 30 from Columbus to Rogers completed.

"They have treated us well," he said, and Columbus "had success from here to Rogers."

Rogers noted the four-lane completion only stretches to the border of District 3, which marks the beginning of NDOR District 2's jurisdiction.

"The area from Rogers to Fremont is in the Omaha

highway district," he said, and "Omaha has absolutely no interest in doing anything with that road. Fremont doesn't either. Nobody cares about it but Columbus."

Had the segment between Rogers and Fremont had the Omaha office's support it may have been completed.

Tim Weander, district engineer for NDOR District 2, said a lack of funding, not a lack of support is what has halted continued development of the expressway system.

There are a lot of needs that have to be met throughout the state and available funding is limited so the state is in maintenance mode, Weander said.

"If you look at what's happened statewide we are in a situation where the funding being received covers the system preservation cost for the entire state," he said. "I don't think support has anything to do with it. It is all based on funding and traffic loads."

Increased traffic volume criteria for expressway construction was another obstacle touched on by City Administrator Joseph Mangiamelli, who has worked

with other community and state leaders to try to reverse the policy decision.

In 2007, the Nebraska State Highway Commission adopted a policy increasing the average daily traffic count to enhance a two-lane highway to four lanes.

"NDOR has raised the average daily traffic count for expressways from 6,000 to 10,000 vehicles, which would again put the (Highway 30) project on the back burner," Mangiamelli said.

According to NDOR's 2006 statewide data, the traffic flow counts along the unfinished Highway 30 corridor could justifiably qualify under the 6,000 average daily traffic volume criteria as Rogers, North Bend and Ames each have traffic counts of 5,515, 5,890 and 6,010 vehicles, respectively.

Statewide leaders have objected to the increased burden and also the lack of public input opportunities presented until more than a year after the state's recommendation was adopted, Mangiamelli said.

Rogers said another longstanding problem is flooding concerns in the North Bend area.

"North Bend has been horrible," he said, and has potentially blocked progress for more than 10 years.

In 2006 a 16-member Highway 30 advisory panel was formed to take into consideration the interests of various groups and selected a preferred route, referred to as "Alternative 8," which would branch off of the existing Highway 30, bending north about three and a half miles west of North Bend and travel east, north of North Bend, until it met up with the Fremont bypass.

Steve McBeth, planning and locations studies engineer for NDOR, said following the recommendation NDOR has to conduct an environmental impact statement process, "which is where we are right now."

Mangiamelli said because the stretch of Highway 30 in the Columbus area is completed, there is little that can be done locally to push for the highway's completion.

Although the community will continue to make its wishes known at the state level, "with (the unfinished segment) being one county removed from Columbus we don't have a lot of say."