

IDOT in 2020: Rebuilding Illinois, Improving Safety, Keeping People And Resources Moving During Pandemic

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SPRINGFIELD — The Illinois Department of Transportation, under the leadership of Gov. JB Pritzker and Acting Illinois Transportation Secretary Omer Osman, met the challenges of COVID-19 in 2020, ensuring infrastructure stayed open and safe, keeping projects on schedule and delivering the first full year of the historic Rebuild Illinois capital program.

“This year tested our agency like no other in our history,” Osman said. “I’m extremely proud of the role IDOT played during this pandemic to keep Illinois safe in 2020. Despite the challenges, the work we accomplished this past year will have a positive impact for generations to come.”

Passed in 2019, Rebuild Illinois made possible approximately \$2.8 billion in improvements to 1,706 miles of highway and 128 bridges, as well as 228 additional safety improvements, in the 2020 fiscal year, the first full year of the bipartisan capital program.

Throughout the state, IDOT was instrumental in the response to the pandemic while meeting the challenges of keeping infrastructure open and projects moving. Even with these obstacles, IDOT kept the construction season on schedule without interruption. The year also brought new commitment to investing in underserved communities and strengthening multimodal connections in a state that serves as the country’s transportation hub.

Pandemic response

At the governor’s direction, IDOT remained open for business throughout the pandemic, with a special focus on the critical mission of maintaining a safe, reliable system of transportation for Illinois. Roads and bridges stayed open. Maintenance and operations staff remained on duty. Projects stayed on course, sustaining jobs and the local economy in many communities.

Rest areas, as usual, were open 24/7, doing their part to keep the nation’s supply chain moving. Volunteer events were held at weigh stations to serve free boxed lunches to truckers to show the public’s appreciation.

Operations personnel across the state delivered over 2,700 pallets and packages of vital Personal Protective Equipment, which went to healthcare facilities, emergency management agencies, testing sites, veterans’ homes, hospitals and other state agencies in the fight against COVID-19.

Highway and bridge improvements

During the 2020 calendar year, IDOT completed more than 600 highway projects, ranging from minor resurfacings to interstate and bridge reconstructions.

A 7-mile stretch of Interstate 255 in the Metro East, one of the worst roads in the state, was rehabilitated and completed nearly a month ahead of schedule. The \$67 million project, one of the first under Rebuild Illinois, was completed cheaper, faster and safer

by closing the work zone to all traffic for one construction season. In the fall, the department broke ground on the Delhi Bypass and the expansion of U.S. 67 to four lanes in Jersey County.

A \$42 million investment upgraded the Murray Baker Bridge in Peoria, another project that saved time and money by diverting traffic and condensing the construction schedule to one year.

In Southern Illinois, more than 5 miles of Interstate 57 were expanded to six lanes between Johnston City and West Frankfort, the latest phase in a multiyear effort to improve safety and capacity along a crucial corridor.

Construction started in July to replace the U.S. 150 bridge over I-57 and the Mattis Avenue bridges over I-57 and I-74, advance projects leading to next year's start of the I-57/74 interchange reconstruction in Champaign-Urbana. A cornerstone of Rebuild Illinois, the I-57/74 project will remake a critical freight juncture that accommodates almost 40,000 vehicles a day.

The \$27.4 million Illinois 178 bridge over the Illinois River in Utica was completed, providing a new gateway with dedicated bike and pedestrian access to Starved Rock and Matthiessen state parks.

A rebuilt 8-mile section of I-70 between Altamont and Effingham opened in the fall.

In the Rockford area, completed projects included a \$20 million resurfacing of Interstate 39 from Baxter Road to Harrison Avenue, along with U.S. 20 from just west of Alpine Road to I-39. The U.S. 20-Illinois 2 interchange was reconfigured to a signalized diamond interchange with various other safety improvements.

A joint project with Iowa, the new Interstate 74 Mississippi River Bridge in the Quad Cities reached a key stage with the opening of the new westbound bridge. The twin eastbound bridge is due to open in late 2021.

The Jane Byrne Interchange in Chicago marked a major milestone with the completion of all 11 ramps at the confluence of Interstates 90, 94 and 290. The project, which modernizes one of the nation's worst bottlenecks, moves to rebuild mainline I-90/94 before wrapping up in 2022.

Progress continued on a new Interstate 80/U.S. 30 interchange in Will County. The project involves extending a third lane in each direction on I-80 from approximately Interstate 355 through U.S. 30. Other components include modernized traffic signals, drainage improvements and the extension of a bicycle and pedestrian path along U.S. 30

before everything wraps up in 2021. Engineering efforts continue on a much larger \$1.1 billion overhaul of I-80 between U.S. 30 and Ridge Road, including replacing the Des Plaines River bridges in Joliet.

A \$14.8 million widening of Illinois 132 through Lindenhurst in Lake County, with multiple safety, pedestrian and bike improvements, finished in September.

Workforce opportunities

Building Blocks of Success, a series of free virtual workshops to drive participation in the Disadvantaged Business Enterprise program and greater diversity on state projects, launched in the fall.

In February, Today's Challenge, Tomorrow's Reward, a skills-building conference that serves to improve connections between prime contractors and the DBE community, set record attendance by drawing 400 participants.

Illinois joined with the Mid-America Association of State Transportation Agencies to establish a standing committee to facilitate sharing information and strategy on issues of diversity and inclusion.

Multimodal vision

The department awarded 52 grants totaling more than \$38 million to support the planning efforts of long-range transportation projects across the state. New criteria established dedicated funding to create economic opportunity and enhance quality of life in disadvantaged communities.

More than \$1.5 million was committed to leverage a total investment of \$31 million for airport improvements in Quincy, Rockford and Champaign-Urbana. The department also awarded \$112 million in grants to 31 downstate transit providers, the first of \$4.5 billion from Rebuild Illinois – \$3 billion in bonding and \$1.5 billion in new pay-as-you-go funding – to invest in transit throughout the state.

An Illinois Marine Transportation System Plan and economic impact analysis study was released, with IDOT asking the public for feedback to strengthen a resource that generates \$36 billion in economic impact annually and supports more than 160,000 jobs. The final report will help guide \$150 million identified in Rebuild Illinois for public ports, with \$40 million already committed to a new inland port at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio rivers in Cairo.

Eye on innovation

With the pandemic limiting in-person gatherings, IDOT turned virtual in 2020, holding several public meetings online. The pivot allowed communities to gain information and provide feedback while keeping the planning process on track for key projects.

A new, modern communications center opened in October at IDOT headquarters in Springfield, serving as a vital link between federal and state partners, the public and the department by providing communications services quickly and reliably.

Illinois continued to be recognized for its work nationally. The safety campaign “Life or Death Illinois” received the Excel Award from the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials, a first in the history of the department. In AASHTO’s America’s Transportation Awards, a partnership with Missouri to rebuild the 92-year-old Champ Clark Bridge in western Illinois garnered top honors in the “Quality of Life /Community Development, Medium Project” category.