



08/12/2005

Meridian connector in progress

By [Kathie Marchlewski](#), Midland Daily News

It's not going to happen tomorrow, or even this year, but the federal highway bill put firmly into place with President Bush's signature this week is the key to a quicker Midland County travel route in the near future.

The \$2.4 million granted for the construction of a road over the Tittabawassee River connecting Meridian Road and M-30 is a big boost to the project that has been years in the works. The next step: more fundraising.

"If I had all of the money right now, we'd be ready to build in 12 months," said Deepak Gupta, the Midland County Road Commission manager. But it's not all there just yet.

The total project cost is about \$4 million. "We're still going to be looking at the state level and county level (for funding)," Gupta said.

But the project is on its way, with wetland issues already addressed and land acquisition complete. The county in 1999 agreed to use 5 acres of land in Lincoln Township on Hope Road north of Beamish Road to mitigate wetlands. By 2001, the Road Commission had completed the creation of the new wetland.

All of the pre-construction work, the planning, engineering and grant-seeking for the project has been done in-house, Gupta said.

"We did a lot of advance legwork," he said. "We did things very efficiently during our off times ... at the end of summer construction, before the beginning of winter snow."

Gupta acknowledged the process has been a long one, but said the wait is not unusual. "We fully expected it," he said. "These things take time."

The new road will provide a direct route to the interchange at US-10 and allow for continuous north-south traffic movement through Midland County.

It will greatly improve travel not only for resident drivers, but for businesses who rely on truck hauling. "It will reduce their travel cost, their travel time. It's something that should have been done a long time ago," Gupta said.

He said the project has made it this far as a result of community cooperation -- all of Midland County's townships and both cities have been in support. "Now it's a matter of putting all the pieces together."