

## Genoa Twp. I-96 interchange hoped to attract development

By Dan Meisler

The days when Livingston County resembled a land rush are over, but there's at least one spot still attracting interest - the area near Latson Road and Interstate 96 in Genoa Township, where a proposed interchange project is gaining momentum.

Located less than a mile from a limited highway exit usable only for a westbound exit and eastbound entrance to I-96, the new interchange has long been sought by local government officials and businesses to ease traffic congestion, provide another north-south road through the county and to give semi-trucks a way to avoid downtown Howell.

Now that several factors appear to be coming together, including federal funding and willingness by the Michigan Department of Transportation to move the project forward, the land around the interchange has become more attractive for potential development.

**Todd Wyett**, manager of Latson Partners LLC, said he's in the process of putting several parcels together in hopes of attracting a large construction project. Wyett developed a retail center a few miles north on Latson Road, which includes a CVS drugstore.

He's got 39 acres put together near the interchange site, he said, as the land is more desirable now that the road project appears to be going forward.

"We're waiting to see how the area develops with the interchange," Wyett said. "We are simply waiting for opportunities to present themselves."

For the first time in many years of discussion, said Mike Craine, managing director of the Livingston County Road Commission, a date to let bids for construction has been identified: March 2010.

"I really think there's a lot of energy for getting it done," he said.

MDOT has left it up to the local units of government to acquire the right-of-way needed for the project, and Craine said that process is moving along.

"So far, with most of the owners we have reached an understanding regarding right-of-way donations," Craine said. "There are still some who are not on board with that yet."

Another complication is a nearby elementary school. Some of the school property would be needed for the interchange, Craine said, and there's talk that the entire school would be sold off for commercial or office uses.

The estimated price tag for the interchange, including right-of-way acquisition, is nearly \$50 million, according to MDOT documents filed with the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. The estimate for the right-of-way cost is \$20 million.

U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Brighton, has helped collect \$10.8 million in federal funds set aside for the interchange, and MDOT has pledged \$2.4 million in gas-tax funds. An additional \$10 million in local funds still needs to be identified.

Another hurdle for development could be the zoning and future land use plans on the books with Genoa Township. The land south of the highway is zoned for residential use with 5-acre minimum lot sizes. That designation is the same in the township's land use plan meant to guide zoning decisions.

The area north of I-96 is a mishmash of different zones, including recreational facilities, single-family housing and high-density housing.

Township supervisor Gary McCririe said the township should be open-minded when it comes to developing the area. "We are, by nature, guided by the future land use plan," he said. "But if someone has an idea other than that, we'd be happy to discuss it."

Wyett pledged cooperation with township government: "We want to work in concert with the township."



Photo by Robert Ramey

**A new interchange has long been sought.**