

Road Construction Survival Guide

Helping Your Business
Prosper Before, During
and After Construction



GREATER MADISON
CHAMBER of COMMERCE

Office of Business Resources
Economic Development Division

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Dear Business Owner:

Road construction can be challenging, but the end result can be very beneficial for your business and customers. In 2009, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce, with support from the Small Business Advisory Council and City of Madison staff, created the Road Construction Survival Guide to offer practical guidance on how to approach road construction work. Since its initial publishing, the guide has gone on to become a national best practice, having been replicated by numerous cities across the country.

The success of the first guide inspired the Chamber to regularly update the document with new information and recommendations. The City of Madison also continues to refine and improve its process and resources to support businesses and residents throughout road construction projects. This third edition provides our up-to-date recommendations for how to approach road construction.

While great strides have been made, road construction will always present challenges. With the right information, proper coordination and strategic planning, your business can not only endure the process, but also prosper.

We hope you find this guide helpful. If you have any additional questions, please visit www.cityofmadison.com/business or madisonbiz.com for more details and staff contact information.

Sincerely,



Zach Brandon, President
Greater Madison Chamber
of Commerce



Satya Rhodes-Conway
Mayor, City of Madison

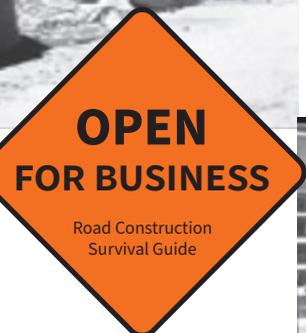




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“You never know what you’ll find when you start a construction project,” says Madison’s City Engineer, Robert Phillips. “For instance, the large University Avenue project was plagued with more rain than expected and underground building foundations we didn’t know about, both of which caused delays. Know that we’ll always do our best, but we never know what we’ll find underground.”

Take Action to Protect Your Business

“Remember that you have a voice,” says Susan Bulgrin, owner of two Culver’s restaurants and a successful veteran of major construction projects “There is a chance to effect change.”

Attention Madison area small business owners—road construction projects will likely financially impact your business. According to a survey by the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce Small Business Advisory Council (SBAC), 68% of business respondents found their revenues declined during a road construction project. Equally alarming was that 54% of respondents indicated their business did not return to prior levels after completion of construction.

But road construction is necessary—pavement, sewers and utilities don’t last forever. Remember, once reconstruction is complete, that corridor is likely to be construction-free for decades, and your business will benefit from the project’s improvements.

So don’t panic: there are things you can do to mitigate the effects on your business. It will require patience—unforeseen issues that delay or lengthen projects always arise, so recognize that local government and project contractors are doing their utmost to resolve issues. It’s in their best interests to complete projects on time.

To help small businesses survive road construction, the Chamber created this survival guide containing appropriate municipal and business contacts, and tips for surviving the construction process.

While road construction can be hard on small businesses, the maintenance and repairs can be good for your company in the end. Carol “Orange” Schroeder, Chair of the Monroe Street Merchants Association, writes:

There is no denying that 2019 was a challenging year for Monroe Street’s business community. Our extensive roadwork project meant that the street was one lane in one direction for nine months. The grant from the city really helped with this effort, because we were able to band together to do many promotions before and during the roadwork period. The theme we used for the campaign was “Survive and Thrive.” Our street was in dire need of repair, these improvements may not be noticeable to the casual visitor, but they are essential to assuring the long-term viability of our business district.



With this positive outcome in mind, be prepared ahead of time. Plan carefully so that once the project is completed, your business can continue to thrive.

Verona Road Business Coalition

Beginning two years before the start of major road construction in the Verona Road Corridor, local business owners and residents developed the Verona Road Business Coalition (VRBC). “We wanted to be prepared for anything that could come during the long road ahead,” said Deirdre Garton, owner of Quivey’s Grove Restaurant.

The VRBC was a volunteer group of Verona Road businesses, residents, commuters and stakeholders concerned about the largest and longest urban road construction in the state. Their goal was to minimize the disruption to businesses over the five-year period; keep businesses, customers and the general public informed of alternative routes; and provide help and support for residents and businesses affected by construction issues. VRBC’s goals were threefold:

- Advocate for and promote businesses along the Verona Road Corridor with WisDOT, by offering up-to-date road conditions and alternate routes.
- Develop and implement marketing and promotions campaigns for VRBC businesses.
- Provide targeted education and communications, before and during construction.

By planning far in advance for the longest and most difficult phase of the Verona Road construction, the group was able to educate and raise awareness for businesses in the corridor.

The group used multiple strategies for helping its members survive the long construction ahead, including:

- Funding from the City of Madison and fundraising activities to provide money for marketing.
- Advocacy and outreach to municipalities involved, WisDOT, neighborhood associations and residents.
- Education and communication in the form of newsletters, a website (veronaroad.info), the VRBC Facebook page, the annual Town Hall Meeting and seminars for local businesses.
- Encouraging marketing and promotions, including ‘Deal of the Day’ initiatives, the Shop Verona Road First campaign and promotional events at area businesses.

Business owners were encouraged to participate in VRBC meetings and communicate with elected officials.

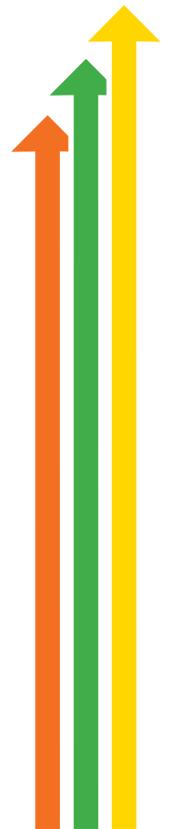




Photo by Alex Radelich on Unsplash

Get Involved Early

The City of Madison typically includes road construction projects within its Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) **several years** in advance of when construction is to occur. You can also find information about upcoming projects on the city's Engineering Projects website: www.cityofmadison.com/engineering/projects.

Every November, the city adopts a capital budget, which includes the final list of road construction projects for the following year. At this time, the city will begin preparing bid documents for the projects.

This is the time to **contact your city alder** and open the lines of communication. If your alder is aware of your concerns and wishes early on, they can be a better advocate for your business community throughout the construction planning process. See www.cityofmadison.com/council to find your alder.

For most projects, the city will release bids and hire a contractor during *the spring prior* to the start of the summer construction season. Once a contractor is hired to complete the work, the city will host another round of pre-construction meetings with the contractor and business owners. The goal of these meetings will not be to gather input, but rather to ensure everyone is aware of the upcoming construction schedule and pertinent construction contacts. Again, **it is critical that you attend these subsequent meetings**.

If you're located outside the city of Madison, contact your local government officials and staff, your chamber of commerce and other business associations.



Business Planning: What You Can Do Before Construction Begins

As a business owner, you're always planning and improving on your business model. When you're informed ahead of time, road construction is something you can prepare for.

Here are some suggestions from business owners who've been through the construction process.

- **Take note of all communications from the city and attend all meetings.** Business owners can contribute ideas and make concerns known by attending public hearings and meetings, filling out comment forms and communicating with city alders. Also, projects change, and this will ensure you have the most current information and can organize your business accordingly.
- **Join local business organizations.** There's strength in numbers. You can pool your resources, develop a neighborhood-wide plan and speak with one voice. Make sure to communicate with other local leaders so you can band together and make concerns heard. Consider assigning association staff as liaisons to the city and the construction group. That person can attend planning meetings to funnel business concerns to the group.
- **Partner with other neighborhood businesses.** Remember: You're not alone. Develop a group plan for staying in contact with the city, construction project leaders and customers.
- **Work with neighborhood associations or consider forming one.** These organizations are often involved in pre-construction meetings.
- **Work with your employees to develop a game plan.** Talk to your employees about the process and strategies to stay prosperous during construction. Discuss marketing efforts and allow employees to share any concerns they may have. Your employees will appreciate the opportunity, and the dialogue may spark new ideas.
- **Identify marketing, advertising and design firms** in the neighborhood that might provide assistance.
- **Inform customers months in advance.** Keeping your customers informed gives them the ability to navigate construction and access your business. Examples can include putting up signs or passing out copies of alternative routes to the business before the project.
- **Gather customer contact information before construction begins so you can keep them apprised of road conditions, best routes and promotional specials during the construction period.** Consider sending weekly e-mails to customers—if you keep them informed and in the loop, they may not be as likely to change their buying habits during construction.

When faced with the redevelopment of a major street, the **Monroe Street Merchant's Association** asked the City of Madison to shorten the construction project timeline from two years to under a year. This meant that there would only be one way traffic on the street for that period, rather than two lanes for two years, and the merchants felt it would be better for business.

They also developed a “Survive and Thrive Construction Kit,” similar to Bucky Book and City Tins. The kits sell for \$9.95 and include \$300 in savings.

- **Get to know the construction supervisors.** The city will provide this information in the months leading up to the project. Having a good relationship with the construction leaders can help as issues arise.
- **Use Facebook, Twitter and other social media.** These are excellent channels for providing updates and reminding customers you're open for business.
- **Contact lenders.** Inform current lenders of the upcoming project and see if there are opportunities to restructure existing debt and lines of credit in light of potentially diminished revenues.
- **Secure a line of credit** while times are good. It's important to get a line of credit during good times when sales are up. That way you'll have it when and if there's an emergency.
- **Keep your staff lean.** It's an unfortunate reality, but if you expect a significant decrease in customers once construction begins, you may need to consider keeping a lean staff. If someone quits in the spring, you may decide to keep the position vacant if there's a construction project coming up that summer. Other options might include job sharing or reducing hours.
- **Reduce inventory.** When possible, reducing inventory can be a useful strategy to respond to slower periods due to construction.
- **You may need to rework your budget.** For instance, more money might be required for cleaning. While there's little you can do to reduce the dust and noise of a construction site, you can focus on keeping your own business as dust-free as possible. If you only clean your windows once a week right now, you might consider increasing that during the construction period. You may also decide to allocate more time or money for general cleaning and upkeep, in order to keep construction dust to a minimum.
- **Don't relocate.** Occasionally businesses facing lease renewals consider moving to avoid construction. Be careful—the city may end up reconstructing your new street just a few years later.

Contact the City of Madison Office of Business Resources to see if your business association can receive a marketing grant during construction. (608) 267-8721



What to Expect Once Construction Begins and How to Mitigate Problems

Dust and noise are inevitable during a construction project and aren't areas where you will have a great deal of control. Traffic delays and blocked access routes are also difficulties that may arise during construction. Here are some ideas for dealing with these issues.

- **Consider using a back entrance for better customer access. Access to your business is often a problem during a construction project.** Make sure there are signs directing your customers to the right entrance.
- **Make sure signage is clear.** Traffic delays will also be inevitable during a construction project, but signage can help a great deal. **See what sort of signs are going up to direct traffic and make sure they make sense for your customers.** Construction crews aren't aware of your needs and often it's just a matter of asking. Also, make sure there's signage properly directing your customers to parking spaces.
- **The city will issue temporary sign permits for most projects.** There are **three types** of temporary signs that can be installed to assist customers: driveway signs, alternate business access signs and directional signs.
 - 1) Driveway signs** help tell motorists where to turn, since construction can make it difficult for motorists to find your driveway. The business provides and installs this sign. No fee is charged for the temporary signs, but it's important that you obtain a permit prior to ordering the signs. The application form is available through the city's Engineering website, at www.cityofmadison.com/engineering/streets-paths/repairs-and-reconstruction/temporary-business-signs
 - 2) Alternate business access signs** are installed by the contractor and businesses may attach their name placards below the alternate business sign. These signs state "Alternate Business Access" and have an arrow on them. They are placed in advance of intersections to inform motorists where to turn. The business provides its name placard, which the project's contractor installs below the sign with the words "Alternate Business Access" on it.
 - 3) Directional signs** are used where the alternate business sign is not an available option. They're used to direct motorists using a side street toward your business. The business provides and installs these signs.
- **Create a friendly rapport with construction workers.** While the on-site construction workers aren't the appropriate people to contact about concerns, it can only improve the situation if you have a rapport with them. You might supply complimentary ice water to crews in the summer.

This said, it's important to emphasize that construction workers are following instructions from their supervisors, and **communicating concerns to supervisors and project leaders is the best way to get results.** To this end, know who those supervisors are and **keep their contact information close** at hand. The city will provide this information in the months leading up to the project.

Anticipating a major reconstruction of Cottage Grove Road, the **Monona East Side Business Alliance** teamed up with the City of Madison in 2016 to create a marketing initiative to promote local businesses.

The resulting campaign, named *Groove On Cottage Grove Road*, used digital ads, signage and a Facebook group to keep the community informed about construction progress and access to affected businesses.



Tips for Survival During Construction

Communication will be critical during the entire construction project. As a business owner, you must communicate with the construction project managers, your employees, other businesses and most importantly, your customers.

Keep the project manager's contact information close at hand. The city will provide this information to you ahead of time.

Provide directions and access information for your employees. Don't let them make the area more congested. Depending on the number of people you employ, you might consider offering a carpool from an agreed upon location. During the Todd Drive construction, Jim Garner, CEO of Sergenian's, organized a shuttle to pick up employees each morning from a lot further away from his business, helping to decrease congestion near his store.

Consider alternate means of getting your message out, such as Twitter or Facebook, if decreased traffic has made your signage ineffective.

Contact suppliers to provide directions. Find out when they'll be delivering, and talk with the project contractor to reschedule construction around your driveway at that time.

Deliver products to your customers. To reach customers unable or unwilling to navigate the construction area, Susan Bulgrin, owner of two Culver's restaurants, initiated a catering business. She brought Culver's to her customers and she credits this as one method that helped her business endure construction.

Keep on message. Consider keeping a script next to your phone, so that you and your employees have quick and easy directions to provide to customers. Make sure all your employees know what to say and how to say it.

Stay informed! Attend all public meetings—those held by the city, business or neighborhood associations or others—relating to the construction project, to voice concerns, get ideas and hear the latest news. Be sure to open all correspondence from the city.

Extend or modify business hours. Consider staying open later in the evening after construction crews are finished for the day. Be flexible to accommodate customer demands and other perceived needs.

Make the construction work for you. If you've been considering a remodel for your business, why not do it during the construction period? Use this slower period to get things done that you haven't had time to address.

See if your business qualifies for a **Facade Grant** to help with the cost of upgrades to the facade of your building: www.cityofmadison.com/facadegrants



Photo by Igor
Ovsyannykov on
Unsplash

Creative promotions. Businesses have come up with lots of creative ways to make the construction period fun for customers.

- One State Street business had a construction worker sit outside of their shop during the lunch break and talk to kids and families about the ongoing project. The trucks were a big draw for kids.
- Some Madison businesses have used prize drawings to attract customers. Do something above and beyond what you would usually do in your business to attract customers.

Consider pooling advertising resources with other businesses in the construction zone to let the public know you're still open for business. If you're part of a business association, consider agreeing to increase dues temporarily so the organization can do district-wide marketing. Then you, as a business owner trying to keep staffing lean, won't have to spend as many resources on it.

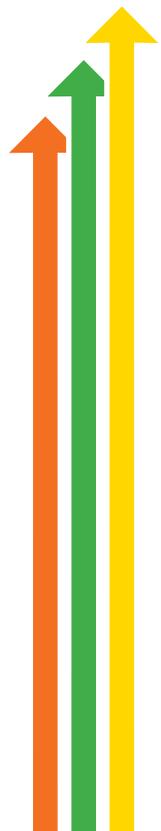
Contact the Office of Business Resources to see if your business association qualifies for a grant to help with special marketing campaigns during construction.

Be positive. Encourage and generate a positive, healthy environment to support your staff and ensure retention of valued employees.



**Office of Business Resources:
We are here to help!**

Depending on the size of the project, there may be matching dollars available to business or neighborhood associations for special marketing campaigns through City programs. Contact Business Development Specialist Michael Miller, mmiller2@cityofmadison.com to find out more! (608) 267-8721



Host a Grand Reopening Event

Following the conclusion of a long and disruptive road construction, it is beneficial to sponsor a Grand Reopening for all of the businesses impacted by the project. Invite members of the media, elected officials, businesses and the general public. A Ribbon Cutting is a great opportunity to celebrate a completed road construction project with businesses and their customers. It announces to the wider community that the business corridor is better than ever and a premier destination.



You Made it! Post-Construction —Now what?

Once construction is over, **acknowledge the hard work and support** of all parties. Thank project contractors and engineers, local officials and anyone who's gone above and beyond to work with local businesses. Everyone appreciates a letter of thanks.

Now's the time to focus on recapturing market share and winning back customers. **Consider promotion and advertising** to let customers know the roadways are free. Promote the new image and convenience of the completed roadway.

Celebrate the project's completion. Hold a ribbon cutting ceremony and invite the news media. Or consider pooling resources with local businesses for a grand celebration and/or shared advertisement.

Finally, **support other businesses that undergo a similar process.** Give them your patronage and provide helpful feedback based on your experiences.

Construction Checklist

Use this checklist before, during and after a construction project to ensure you're doing everything you can to mitigate financial damage to your business.

- Review initial correspondence from the city about the project, generally received a year in advance. Attend all public meetings about the project and make your voice heard. www.cityofmadison.com/engineering/projects
- Contact your city alder and government officials to open lines of communication. www.cityofmadison.com/council
- Attend meetings of neighborhood associations and local business groups and contact The Chamber. madisonbiz.com
- Reach out to businesses in other neighborhoods that have dealt with construction projects.
- Talk to the Economic Development Division's Office of Business Resources to see if your business district qualifies for a marketing grant. 608-267-8721
- Work with your employees to develop a game plan.
- Talk to your bank about outstanding debt or getting a line of credit **before** business slows.
- Review and adjust staffing, budgets, debt and inventory.
- Consider using a back entrance or alternative entrance.
- Work with marketing, advertising and design firms in the neighborhood—and pool resources with other businesses—to develop a communications campaign.
- Inform customers in advance and ongoing.
- Provide directions and access information to employees and suppliers.
- Make sure signage is clear and apply for a temporary signage permit at www.cityofmadison.com/engineering/streets-paths/repairs-and-reconstruction/temporary-business-signs, if needed.
- Create a friendly rapport with construction workers.
- Hold creative promotions to attract business.
- After construction is complete, thank involved parties, celebrate and promote the increased convenience of improved roadways.



Acknowledgments:

This document was made possible thanks to the efforts of the Chamber Small Business Advisory Council, The Chamber, City of Madison staff and Madison's Central Business Improvement District.

Additional Business Resources

For additional help, you might consider seeking free guidance from local business organizations such as:

Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce

(608) 256-8348
FAX: (608) 256-0333
info@madisonbiz.com
madisonbiz.com

Madison Development Corporation

(608) 256-2799
mdcorp.org

Office of Business Resources

City of Madison
(608) 267-8721
FAX: (608) 261-6126
mmiller2@cityofmadison.com
www.cityofmadison.com/dpced/economic-development/office-of-business-resources/223/

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)

MGE Innovation Center
(608) 441-2820
madison.score.org

University of Wisconsin-Madison Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

Grainger Hall
(608) 263-2221
sbdc@bus.wisc.edu

Small Business Answer Line

Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(800) 940-7232
sbdcanswerline@bus.wisc.edu

Wisconsin Women’s Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)

2300 S. Park Street, Suite 103
Madison, WI 53713
(608) 257-5450
wwbic.com



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