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Interstate construction work nears season's end

By [Jim Dayton](#)

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NEWVILLE--When roundabout construction began on Highway 59 in October and turned the road into a messy collection of orange barrels, business at the Culver's in Newville took a turn for the worse.

Construction crews worked on the Highway 59 bridge over the Interstate during the summer. Tiffany Mielke, the restaurant's general manager, expected sales to decrease then, but it was not until the installation of three nearby roundabouts and road resurfacing work in fall that Culver's started to struggle.

“When they started messing with the roundabouts, every day it was a different way to get through,” Mielke said. “It really started to affect us.”

While that may have temporarily deterred business, Mielke can soon breathe a sign of relief. Work on Highway 59 is nearing completion, and most construction on the Interstate will soon come to a halt for the season with winter approaching.

Sunday's snowfall timed well with the end of construction. Contractors generally plan to do Interstate work until the end of November after beginning in either March or April, said Steven Theisen, the I-90/39 project communications manager.

This summer's Interstate work focused primarily on bridge replacements and redoing interchanges, and 18 of 20 summer projects were completed in November. Crews also temporarily widened the Interstate, which is necessary before it can be fully widened to three lanes in each direction, Theisen said.

Though most construction is finished or will be done this week, some demolition work will continue throughout the winter. Crews will eventually replace both Interstate bridges over the Rock River, and demolition of the former northbound bridge is ongoing, he said.

Theisen said shifting the bridges was complex work to ensure two lanes of traffic remained open in both directions. Workers will also need to be cognizant of boat traffic during the summer months, since the project is not slated for completion until 2018.

The I-90/39 project remains on schedule despite concerns at the state Capitol about transportation funding. For now, project officials are focused on the current stages of the project to minimize delays, Theisen said.

“We have our construction crews out there focusing on their current work,” he said. “We have financial teams looking ahead, but we want to make sure we get it done efficiently and safely. Staying on point and staying focused, that's certainly our top priority.”

The state Department of Transportation has tried to communicate any delays with local businesses so they can plan ahead. At Culver's in Newville, the DOT hung a sign inside the restaurant explaining the new

roundabouts to customers, Mielke said.

Telling customers how to navigate the roundabouts to get back on the Interstate has been a daily task for Culver's employees over the past two months. But Mielke believes the new road layout is user-friendly and business will soon rebound.

“I will be very happy it's over because people are frustrated. You can feel it when they come in,” she said. “It's just new. They need to get used to it.”