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What Lies Beneath: (Deep) Inside INDOT's 421 Forward Project

The Indiana Department of Transportation's (INDOT) proposed 421 Forward project – located on US 421 between Greenfield/Templin Road to County Road 300 South – will help address driver and pedestrian mobility needs. When completed, it is anticipated that the project will include various roadway improvements including pavement rehabilitation, added auxiliary lanes, intersection improvements, pedestrian facilities, and storm drainage enhancements.

But before the visible work is complete – and before it can even be designed – the INDOT design team must deal with what isn't seen: An intricate underground maze of infrastructure.

This aspect of a road project is rarely seen or even considered by the traveling public. As is the case with the vast majority of infrastructure, it is largely hidden – it “lies beneath.” And yet the availability of clean water, waste removal, and telephone and internet service is fundamental to daily life. Addressing it is a required step in virtually every road project.

Generally speaking, new and refurbished roadways rest on a foundation that runs anywhere from 5-20 feet deep, allowing the road to perform well into the future. At that depth, the odds are high that excavation will reach buried infrastructure like cable and phone lines as well as water, gas and sewer pipes. This infrastructure must be located and identified, and plans are made to move or go around them.

Such is the case with 421 Forward. The project, located in Boone County, is approximately a mile and a quarter long and 150 feet wide and straddling the city of Carmel and the town of Zionsville – busy, growing areas. Using ground-penetrating radar, test holes and other tools, the design team has identified approximately 20 different utilities within the footprint of the project – fiber optic cables, telephone lines, gas lines, and water and sewer pipes. The assessment is only half complete, as the project scope is still being evaluated.

Locating the infrastructure is only the start of the process, though. The design team must determine whether the infrastructure runs horizontally or vertically, which will inform whether it can be designed around or require relocation. Ownership of the infrastructure must also be determined, and some may be old utility lines that are no longer being used.

Once the team can say with certainty what the project scope will be, and they identify the infrastructure that lies in the path of that scope, the process of relocation will begin. It's not as easy as it

sounds. Working with the utility companies, the team will weigh the relocation plans against considerations about planned upgrades and future service expansion. Only then can the physical relocation work begin, and only when the relocation work is complete can the roadwork itself begin.

If you would like to learn more from the project team about what lies beneath, please contact Blake Dollier.

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About 421 Forward

The proposed 421 Forward project – located on US 421 between Greenfield/Templin Road up to County Road 300 South – is intended to address driver and pedestrian mobility needs. Various roadway improvements including pavement rehabilitation, added auxiliary lanes, intersection improvements, pedestrian facilities and storm drainage enhancements are anticipated. Design will begin in 2024 and is expected to last through the summer of 2026. 421 Forward is a state investment to improve infrastructure. Infrastructure that works is at the core of the Indiana Department of Transportation's mission and why Indiana was ranked in the top five for infrastructure by CNBC.