



**Progress
Ahead**

**Marion
Businesses**

#OPEN4YOU

Road Construction Survival Guide

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Reach higher!



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March 2016

Dear Marion Business Owner:

Road construction can present challenges for businesses, but with the right information, proper coordination and strategic planning, your business can not only endure the process, but also prosper during it.

The Marion Chamber of Commerce, with support from the City of Marion, has created this Road Construction Survival Guide to offer practical guidance on how to best approach road construction work.

A healthy, robust transportation system makes our city move. As we improve the drivability of streets, enhance safety and extend the life of water and wastewater utility systems, we are also reminded of the potential community impacts.

We hope this guide will help you and your employees prepare for any future disruptions. The toolkit includes practical ideas to help minimize inconvenience on your business.

We are working to improve our business environment and create jobs. A thriving economy provides opportunities and long-term stability for our region.

If you have any additional questions, please don't hesitate to contact City or Chamber staff. We want to help your business throughout the process. Road construction can be challenging at times, but the end result can be very rewarding for your business.

Sincerely,

Jill Ackerman



President,
Marion Chamber of Commerce

Nicolas AbouAssaly



Mayor,
City of Marion



Reach higher!

Take Action to Protect Your Business

Attention Marion business owners—if your business is located in a road construction project area, your business will likely be financially impacted.

It's no secret—road construction impacts business. At the same time, road construction is necessary every few decades. Pavement, sewers and other utilities don't last forever. It is important to remember that once reconstruction is complete, the area is likely to be construction-free for years 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 is in their best interest, too, to complete projects on time.

To help small businesses near road construction areas, the Chamber has 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.

One Marion business owner who endured two years of road construction said: **Although it was a painful process, the end product was worth it. The project enhanced the traffic flow to my business and my guests are more likely to frequent my business as a result.**

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.



“Good planning and preparation for construction is critical to a successful project. Still, things will come up during construction that you don’t expect. Examples of this include rainfall that far exceeds what we would normally expect in a year,” says Marion’s city engineer, Dan Whitlow. “We’ll always do our best to stay with the plan we laid out when the project started, sometimes adjustments in sequencing and schedules are necessary when the unexpected happens.”

Get Involved Early

“Remember that you have a voice,” says Phil High, owner of Philip’s Diamond Shop and a successful veteran of major construction projects. “This is an opportunity to impact change.”



The City of Marion typically includes road construction projects within its Comprehensive Plan, several years in advance of when construction is to occur. Information about upcoming projects can be found on the City’s website: www.cityofmarion.org.

Since 2007 the City has been in the process of reaching out to businesses in developing, adopting and implementing the Central Corridor Project. Various mailings have been sent and a number of meetings have been held in anticipation of this major project. Your concerns, questions, and suggestions have and will continue to be critical.

Please watch for additional mailings and **attend meetings** to learn more about the project and to provide any input you may have.

Once a project has been approved and a contract awarded, the City will host 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.**

This is also the time to **contact your city council person** and open the lines of communication. If your ward representative is aware of your concerns and wishes early on, he or she can be a better advocate for your business throughout the process. In addition, your local government officials and staff, your Chamber of Commerce, and other business associations can be helpful resources and advocates for your business.

At the end of this publication you will find a ward map and listing of current City Council members. Additional business resources are also identified.

Reach out to businesses in other neighborhoods that have dealt with construction projects. Discuss how they prepared for the project and what actions they took during and after construction. Ask what worked well and what they would have done differently—there’s no need to reinvent the wheel.

Business owners can contribute ideas and make concerns known by attending public hearings and meetings, communicating with City Council members and staff, and working with the Marion Chamber, Uptown Marion and MEDCO.

Contact City’s Engineering Department directly at 319-743-6340. Secure individual meetings with the project engineers. And visit the project pages of the City’s website regularly - www.cityofmarion.org/CentralCorridor



PROGRESS AHEAD

Marion Businesses #OPEN4YOU

It will be important throughout construction that your business stays top of mind with consumers. The Marion Chamber along with Uptown Marion have developed resources to help you as the Central Corridor Construction transforms the 7th Avenue corridor.

The City of Marion and the Marion Chamber of Commerce will work with you during this process to make sure you have current information about the construction progress and to assist you with whatever your needs may be during this time.



Marketing Campaign Resources Include:



- Colorful signs posted throughout the corridor as permitted
- Color images of the signs to post online
- Black-and-white images for newsletters and business advertisements
- A marketing/communications campaign to encourage media coverage of the reconstruction and gain publicity for businesses
- A series of business-generating promotional events in the construction corridor
- Regular email updates from the City's Engineering Department
- Regular social media updates on the City of Marion, Iowa Government Facebook page
- Face to face updates with the Engineering Department will be scheduled as needed
- A web page, www.cityofmarion.org/CentralCorridor, dedicated to the latest updates and information relating to the project
- Ground breaking and ribbon cutting events will be conducted to draw media attention

Business Planning: Before Construction Begins

As a business owner, you're always planning and improving 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. Projects change, and this will ensure you have the most current information and can organize your business accordingly.

Join local business organizations and participate.

There's strength in numbers. Make sure to communicate with other local leaders so you can band together and make concerns heard. Consider assigning business owner liaisons to the city and the construction group. That person can attend planning meetings to funnel business concerns to the groups. It's hard for small businesses to find the time to attend various meetings, so the liaison model can be very effective.

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 closely with city engineering staff in the pre-bid stage.

As construction contracts are written ensure the contracts include business-friendly requirements. These might include regularly scheduled meetings before and during construction with business owners and construction staff. Uptown businesses can negotiate requirements that sidewalk access to businesses be available at all times, that construction be suspended and sites cleaned during critical business days, such as the Swamp Fox Festival, and that contractors post "all businesses are open" signs.



Business Planning: Before Construction Begins

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 that will benefit your business.

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. See www.marioncc.org or www.cityofmarion.org for a variety of printable materials.

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 emails to customers—if you keep them informed and in the loop, they may not be as likely to change their buying habits during construction.

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.



Business Planning: Before Construction Begins

Secure a good line of credit while times are good.

It's important to get a line of credit during a good time 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.





Cedar Falls: Case Study

Cedar Falls went through a similar tough construction season when their Main Street underwent a complete infrastructure and streetscape overhaul, right up to the businesses' front doors. Community leaders worked with area businesses to add secondary entrances for those impacted by concrete work. Contractors also made a commitment that none of the businesses would ever lose complete access to their store and that an entrance would always be maintained.

The Cedar Falls Chamber and Main Street District created the "Great Excavations, Digging Downtown" campaign. Carol Lilly, Director of the Cedar Falls Community Main Street, led the effort which included:

- Regular meetings of local businesses to plan promotions and communicate progress
- Digging Downtown t-shirts distributed to area businesses for employees to wear on designated days
- Regular, weekly updates with local radio personalities
- Daily visits from the City's project engineer to provide updates on progress
- Banners and wayfinding signage near areas of reduced access
- Unique events to increase foot traffic such as inviting kids to come watch the progress and see the large equipment in action
- Retail events such as sidewalk sales in the alley
- Lemonade and snack breaks for contractors to create a good working relationship
- Continuous communication to the community regarding progress, events and business/store specials

Cedar Falls community leaders emphasized it wasn't always easy, but the end result was worth it.



Tips for Survival when Construction is Underway

Dust and noise are both 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.

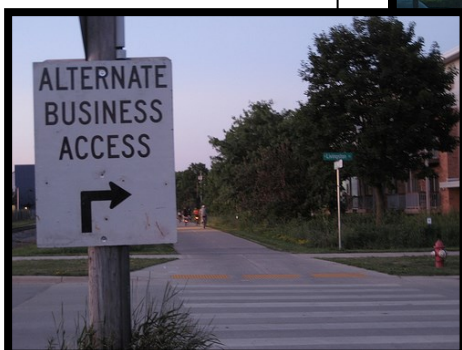
Traffic delays will also be inevitable during a construction project, but signage can help a great deal. See what sort of signs are going up to direct traffic and make sure they make sense for your customers. Construction crews aren't aware of your needs and often it's just a matter of asking. Also, 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 business signs that can be installed to assist customers: driveway signs, alternate business access signs and directional signs. 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 these signs.

Alternate business access signs are installed by the

contractor to inform motorists where to turn. Business name placards will be installed below the alternate business access sign.



Tips for Survival when Construction is Underway

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. Extra temporary business signage is highly recommended to provide easier access for your customers during construction.

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 create a friendly 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.



Tips for Survival when Construction is Underway

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.



Instagram

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.

Consider alternate means of getting your message out, such as social media, online channels or reaching out to local media and pitching a special-interest story, 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 you might consider a delivery service for your products if possible.

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 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.

Tips for Survival when Construction is Underway

Creative Promotions. Businesses can implement creative ways to make the construction period fun for customers.

- Use prize drawings to attract customers. Do something above and beyond what you would usually do in your business to attract customers.
- Use the construction as an educational opportunity for your customers. Partner with the City of Marion and the Chamber to display renderings of the completed construction so customers can visualize what the project will look like when complete.

“Make it fun and customers will keep coming,” says Cathy Petersen, owner of Wit’s End Coffeehouse. “Talk to your neighbors and pool your resources. Be creative.”

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.

Be positive. Encourage and generate a positive, healthy environment to support your staff and ensure retention of valued employees and customers. Customers view you as a valuable source of information. Take opportunities to share your knowledge of the project with them.

The Marion Chamber of Commerce will use its summer events (Uptown Marion Market & Uptown Getdown) to educate local residents about the construction, the schedule and the importance of supporting local business.



You Made It! What to Do Post-Construction

Once construction is over, **acknowledge the hard work and support** of all parties. Thank project contractors and engineers, local government departments such as City Engineering, and anyone who's gone above and beyond to work with local businesses. Everyone appreciates a letter of thanks. Now is the time to focus on recapturing market share and winning back customers.

Consider promotions and advertising to let customers know the roadways are construction-free. Promote the new image and convenience of the completed roadway.

Celebrate the project's completion. Take advantage of your Chamber membership by holding a ribbon-cutting ceremony and invite the news media to the ceremony. Or consider pooling resources with local businesses for a grand celebration and/or shared advertisement.

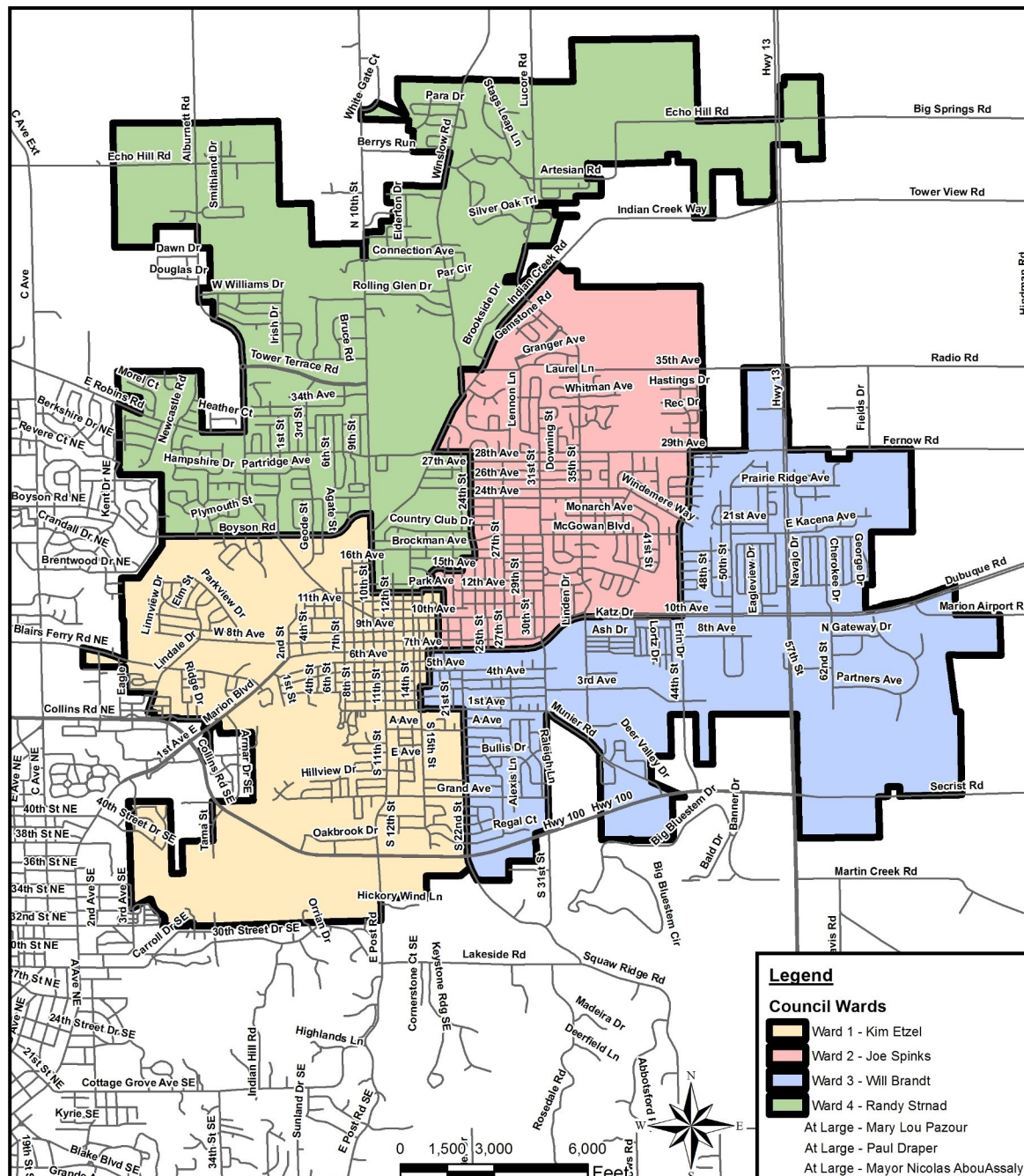


Host a Grand Reopening Event

Following the conclusion of a disruptive road construction project along Marion's Central Corridor, the Marion Chamber of Commerce will sponsor a grand reopening of the road as key sections are put back in use. All businesses impacted by the project are welcome to participate and will receive mention in all promotional materials. Members of the media, elected officials, businesses and

the general public are invited to attend. Ribbon-cuttings are a great opportunity to celebrate completed projects with Central Corridor businesses, customers and the community at-large.

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



CONTACT CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mayor Nicolas AbouAssaly	743-6305	marionmayor@cityofmarion.org
At-Large – Mary Lou Pazour	377-1309	marionatlarge1@cityofmarion.org
At-Large – Paul Draper	377-8393	marionatlarge2@cityofmarion.org
Ward One – Kim Etzel	447-9382	ward1@cityofmarion.org
Ward Two - Joe Spinks	377-1070	ward2@cityofmarion.org
Ward Three – Will Brandt	389-9918	ward3@cityofmarion.org
Ward Four – Randy Strnad	377-3276	ward4@cityofmarion.org

This resource is provided by:



In collaboration with:



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Consider seeking free guidance from local business organizations such as:

Marion Chamber of Commerce

1225 6th Avenue, Suite 100
Marion, IA 52302
(319) 377-6316
info@marioncc.org
www.marioncc.org

City of Marion—Engineering Department

1225 6th Avenue, Suite 200
Marion, IA 52302
(319) 743-6340
mbarkalow@cityofmarion.org
www.cityofmarion.org

Uptown Marion—A Main Street Iowa District

1225 6th Avenue, Suite 100
Marion, IA 52302
(319) 743-4726
ashley@marioncc.org
www.uptownmarion.com

Marion Economic Development Corp (MEDCO)

1225 6th Avenue, Suite 100
Marion, IA 52302
(319) 377-6316
nick@medcoiowa.org
www.medcoiowa.org

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) East Central Iowa

2750 1st Avenue NE
Cedar Rapids, IA 52403
Monday – Friday: 10 a.m. – 3pm
(319) 362-6943
scorecr.org

Kirkwood Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

3375 Armar Drive
Marion, IA 52302
(319) 377-8256
kirkwood.edu/ktos/sbdc