Survival Guide
A Business Toolkit for Making the Best of Road Construction
Road construction can present challenges for businesses. With the right information, proper coordination and strategic planning, your business can both endure the process and prosper when the project is completed.

The Monroe Chamber of Commerce has assembled a toolkit of practical ideas to help your business navigate potentially disruptive impacts during a period of extended road construction. We hope this guide will benefit you and your employees. If you have additional questions, please contact the Monroe Chamber. We are here to help throughout this process, and are confident the end result of construction will be rewarding for your business and the whole community.

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This “Survival Guide” has been compiled based on publications from Wisconsin Department of Transportation, McHenry County Division of Transportation, City of Madison, City of Lenexa, Kings Beach North Lake Tahoe, City of Dubuque, New York State Department of Transportation, UW Extension and Wisconsin’s Small Business Development Center.
Roads, bridges, sidewalks and utilities do not last forever. Over time, construction is necessary to maintain, repair and rebuild infrastructure.

The long-term results of road construction include more efficient traffic flow, increased safety, better access and an enhanced image for your customers.

In the short term, however, road construction can disrupt traffic, increase congestion and temporarily alter access, making it more difficult for customers to visit your business. Road construction is often preceded by separate projects to install new or move existing utility lines, which may briefly interrupt electric, water, sewer or telecommunications services.

Because your business is located in a major road construction project area, be aware that it could be financially impacted. But don’t panic! You can take action to minimize the effects on your business. Once reconstruction is complete, the 8th Street corridor will likely be construction-free for years, and your business will benefit from the improvements.

**We want to help you make it through the road ahead. This survival guide of tools and tips includes:**

- Early business planning strategies to ready your company for the street construction season.
- What to expect when construction begins.
- Survival tips for making it through construction.
  - How to retain your customer base during difficult times.
  - Communication, staying on message, staying positive and using creative promotion and business strategies.
- Post-construction ideas to get you back on track.
- Municipal and business contacts in case you have questions or encounter problems.

As a business owner, it is up to you to plan ahead, be proactive and possibly make short-term adjustments to maintain your core customer base and lessen the impact of road construction. Through communication and cooperation, your business will not only succeed during construction, but it will emerge better equipped to capitalize on opportunities the improved road provides.
Many of the following ideas are part of everyday business planning that you've probably already thought of or are in the process of doing.

**Gather information and make contacts**
Meet with project managers and contractors to establish lines of communication, learn about specific project details, schedules, and discuss any expected traffic impact. Proper coordination between property owners, construction officials, contractors and businesses can help reduce construction-related disruption.

**Take note of city communications and attend meetings**
Watch for mailings and attend meetings to learn about upcoming construction projects, ask questions or raise concerns. Projects change, and this will ensure you have the most current information and can organize your business accordingly. Keep in mind that the greatest opportunity to suggest changes to a project is early in the planning process.

**Get advice others who have experienced road construction projects**
Consider the impact construction will have on your customers, employees and suppliers. Talk with other business owners about how they prepared for a past road construction 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. If your business is part of a franchise, your corporate headquarters may have some guidance as well.

**Partner with other affected businesses**
You are not in this alone. Businesses that work together to share resources and address concerns have great advantages. The Monroe Chamber of Commerce can serve as an advocate for the business community throughout the construction process. We can also offer outlets to market your business and find partnerships at networking events.

**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.

**Inform customers in advance**
Obtaining contact information for your customers will help you keep them informed of road conditions, detour routes, parking availability, and promotional specials during the construction period. Notifying customers long before a project start date can be crucial to getting them into your store once construction begins. Consider sending regular e-mails to customers and using social media to share messages for very low cost.
Gather customer contact info
So you can keep them apprised of road conditions, best routes and promotional specials during the construction period. Consider sending periodic 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. These lists will be helpful AFTER construction as well!

Contact lenders
Inform current lenders of the upcoming construction project and see if there are opportunities to restructure existing debt and lines of credit in light of potentially diminished revenues. It’s important to get a line of credit during a good time when sales are up. That way you’ll have it if there’s an emergency.

Make a staffing plan
Examine your overhead and employee staffing levels to make sure they are appropriate for the construction period. 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 could include job sharing or reducing hours.

Reduce inventory
Reducing inventory — if the scenarios you evaluate call for it — can be a useful strategy to respond to slower periods during construction.

Consider reworking your budget
While there’s little you can do to reduce the dust and noise of a construction site, you might decide to allocate more time or money for general cleaning and upkeep during the construction period to keep your own business as dirt-free as possible.

Don't relocate
Occasionally, businesses facing lease renewals consider moving to avoid construction. Be careful. The city may plan to reconstruct that street just a few years later. Check with city staff on future plans before making any big decisions.
Dust and noise are inevitable during a construction project, and you won’t have much control over either one. Traffic delays and changed access routes are also difficulties that may arise during construction.

City employees and project contractors work hard to complete construction projects on time with the least amount of disruption to your business. Unforeseen issues can delay or lengthen projects — like rainfall that exceeds normal amounts or buried utility lines that aren’t indicated in the records. Be patient and communicate any concerns to the city right away during construction.

Clear signage
Access to your business can be affected during a construction project. Pay attention to the signs the city puts up to direct traffic, and ensure those signs make sense for your customers. Make sure there are signs directing your customers to the correct entrance and to parking areas (keeping in mind that entrance may be in the back of the store). The city will provide signage along the roadway, but business owners may want to supplement with signs of their own.

Businesses may place additional signage along side streets.
- Sign limited to 2 feet x 2 feet, maximum height 3 feet
- Sign and location must be approved by Monroe Public Works Department. *(They meet every 2 weeks.)*
- No additional signage allowed in construction zone
- No signs will be allowed on construction signs

Create a friendly rapport with construction workers
Construction workers follow instructions from their supervisors, and communicating concerns to supervisors and project leaders is the best way to get results. But fostering a friendly relationship with on-site construction workers is a smart move. For example, complimentary ice water for crews or even sweet treats.

Keep the project manager's contact information close
Ken Plowman, Fehr Graham
Project Leader, (815) 238-0032
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Provide directions and access information for your employees
Make sure employees know about any access or parking changes at your business. Don’t let them make the area more congested.

Contact suppliers to provide directions
Keep delivery people informed about detour routes and alternate entrances. Encourage delivery during non-peak traffic times to reduce congestion.
Stay on message
Keep a script next to your phone so you and your employees have quick and easy directions, and tips to provide to customers. Make sure all your employees know what to say and how to say it.

Reduce traffic on 8th Street when you can
We all need to work together to reduce traffic on 8th Street so contractors can complete their work efficiently, quickly and safely, while maintaining the traffic stream so customers and employees can reach the businesses as easily as possible.

When four lanes are reduced to two lanes, it becomes essential to reduce traffic by a significant amount. Even when 8th Street’s capacity has been cut in half, diverting 10-20 percent of the traffic to other routes can keep the traffic stream workable for both drivers and the contractor. That allows the remaining 80-90 percent of traffic to flow through the work zone at a reasonable speed and for drivers to reach businesses along the route.

Stay informed
Attend all public meetings related 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
Adjust or extend business hours to avoid the most disruptive construction activities. 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 or façade improvements, why not do it during the construction period? Use this slower time to get things done that you haven’t had time to address.

Deliver products to your customers
To reach customers unable or unwilling to navigate the construction area, consider making deliveries during construction.

Be positive
Stay positive. Let your customers know you will be open, that they will have access to your business throughout the project, and that you appreciate their loyalty. Don't create negative memories for customers that will last long after the project is complete. It's easier said than done, but this is critical.

Create and encourage a positive, healthy environment for your staff to not only retain your customer base, but also ensure retention of valued employees.
Create or expand a marketing plan
Be proactive by creating a marketing plan or, if you have one, update or expand it. Make sure your marketing plan and budget are flexible and allow you to use new marketing tools to best adapt to today’s fast-changing marketplace. Make strategic investments that position your business in places where consumers are increasingly going to research products or services and make purchases.

Consider alternate means of getting your message out
Expand your business presence on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest) that your customers are most likely to use. If you’ve built up a following — or have money to spend on advertising — these are excellent channels for providing updates and announcing events and reminding customers that you’re open for business.

Deal-of-the-day websites (e.g., Groupon, LivingSocial) are another way to promote your business and any deals that you offer. This can be a great option for bringing both locals and out-of-town visitors to your business.

Pool resources with other businesses
Consider creating a joint promotional campaign or pooling advertising dollars with other businesses affected by the road construction project. Partner with another location to co-rent space or do pop up locations.

Keeping customers engaged
Loyal customers who patronize your business during nearby construction deserve to be recognized and rewarded. There are many ways to make it easier for them to access your business and to reward and encourage their continued patronage.

- Hold special promotions to raise customer awareness (such as a “hard-hat deal of the week”).
- Plan special promotional events around construction milestones, such as groundbreaking, mid-point celebrations and ribbon-cuttings.
- Once construction is complete, celebrate the new image and convenience of the finished project through advertising and promotions.

Creative promotions
Businesses have come up with lots of creative ways to make the construction period fun for customers. Do something above and beyond what you would normally do to attract customers, such as offer a free drink with an entrée, prize drawings, special pricing on an item during construction, a bounce-back coupon to visit the business later, or a frequent customer punch card.

Consider partnering with neighboring businesses to offer joint promotions. For example, package your product or service with a complementary product or service, and share the marketing and advertising costs with your neighbor.
Congratulations on making it through a stretch of road construction! Now what?

**Acknowledge the hard work and support of all parties**
When construction ends, thank project contractors and engineers, local government departments, and anyone who has gone above and beyond to work with local businesses. Everyone appreciates a letter of thanks.

**Consider promotions and advertising**
Now it’s time to recapture the market share and win back customers who may have gone astray. Let customers know 8\textsuperscript{th} Street is complete and traffic is flowing. Promote the new image and convenience of the completed roadway.

**Celebrate the project's completion**
Consider pooling resources with local businesses impacted by the project for a grand celebration, reopening or shared advertisement. Invite members of the media, elected officials, businesses and the public.

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

**Ken Plowman, Fehr Graham**  
Project Leader, 815.238.0032  
kplowman@fehr-graham.com

**Alan Gerber, City of Monroe**  
Public Works Director, 608.329.2535  
agerber@cityofmonroe.org

**Jesse Duff, Fehr Graham**  
Project Engineer, 608.329.6400  
jduff@fehr-graham.com

**Alliant Energy**—1.800.ALLIANT

**Charter**—1.855.757.7328

**City Water Department**—Daytime hours 608.329.2480. After hours 608.558.4947.

**City Sanitary Department**—Daytime hours 608.329.2590. After hours 608.558.0446

**TDS Telecom**—1.866.571.6662

**WE Energy**—1.800.662.4797