

ROAD CONSTRUCTION

Survival Guide

Second edition, March 2011



GREATER MADISON
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
LEADERSHIP AT WORK



SMALL BUSINESS
ADVISORY COUNCIL
to the GMCC and the Mayor of Madison



cityofmadison.com/roadworks



This guide is available
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Dear Madison-area 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.

In 2009, the Small Business Advisory Council, with support from Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce and City of Madison staff, created the Road Construction Survival Guide to offer practical guidance on how to approach road construction work.

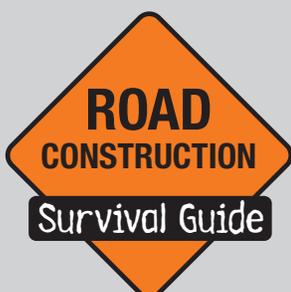
The success of the initial guide inspired the SBAC to update the document to promote newer resources, information and recommendations from Madison-area businesses. Thanks to generous contributions from Supreme Structures, Incorporated, and Judy Dahl, principal at JKD Communications, LLC, the new guide was published in 2011.

We hope this guide will help you and your employees prepare for any future disruptions. 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,

Jennifer Alexander
President, GMCC

David Cieslewicz
Mayor, City of Madison



Take action to protect your business

Attention Madison-area small business owners—if your business is located in a road construction project area, your business will likely be financially impacted. According to a recent survey by the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce Small Business Advisory Council (SBAC), an advisory group to the chamber and the Madison Mayor, 68% of business respondents found their revenues declined during a road construction project. Equally alarming was that 54% of the same respondents indicated their businesses did not return to prior levels after completion of construction, and for some continued to decrease.

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

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

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, too, to complete projects on time.

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

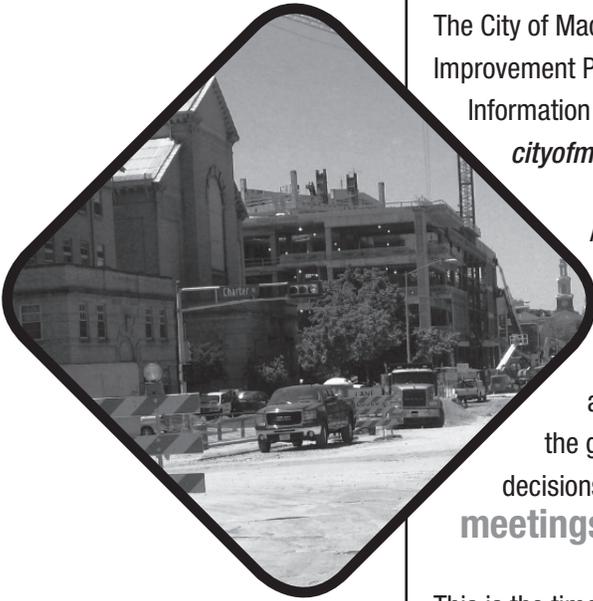
While road construction can be hard on small businesses, the maintenance and repairs can be good for your company in the end. One Madison business owner who went through two years of road construction said: Although it was a painful process, the end product was worth it. The project enhanced the traffic flow to my business and my guests are more likely to frequent my business because of this.

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 given year or underground fuel tanks and buried utility lines that aren't indicated in the records,” says Madison’s city engineer, Robert Phillips. “Know that we'll always do our best to stay with the plan we laid out when the project started, but sometimes adjustments in sequencing and schedules are necessary when the unexpected happens.”



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.

Information about upcoming projects can also be found on the city's Road Works website cityofmadison.com/roadworks.

As early as a year before the start of construction, the city will start the process of reaching out to businesses within the affected corridor. This will likely include mailings to business owners inviting them to planning meeting(s) for the project. Your concerns, questions, and suggestions are very important at this early stage in the planning process as the city has the greatest flexibility to incorporate changes into the project at this time, before decisions have been made. Please watch for mailings and **attend these initial meetings** to learn more about the project and to provide any input you may have.

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, he or she can be a better advocate for your business community throughout the construction planning process.

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

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'd have done differently—there's no need to reinvent the wheel.

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.

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.



WILLY LIVES

Beginning about two years before the start of major construction in the Williamson Street area, Dick Zillman, owner of Zillman Advertising, and the Greater Williamson Area Business Association (GWABA) developed “Willy Lives,” a guerilla campaign that allows area businesses and GWABA to pool their resources and remind the community at large that they’re open for business during construction. GWABA received the first-ever city grant of its type—\$5,000—to help implement the plan.

“Through alder involvement, the neighborhood organizations, volunteers and GWABA, a lot of people have worked really hard to receive presentations from the city engineering department to ask for clarification and provide input,” says Zillman. “The city has been incredibly receptive and has bent over backward to amend the plan [to better meet our needs].”



Photos courtesy of shopsofwillystreet.com

THE CAMPAIGN INCLUDES:



- Posting colorful yard signs throughout the neighborhood as permitted
- Color images of the signs to post online at web portals

- Black-and-white images for neighborhood newsletters and businesses’ advertisements
- A marketing/communications campaign to incite media to cover the reconstruction as news and spawn publicity for businesses
- A series of business-generating promotional events in the neighborhood
- A listserve and a members-only Facebook page with construction updates and successful tactics businesses have used
- A public Facebook page focused on neighborhood events and promotions to draw customers to local businesses
- A web page, willylives.com, is in the works

Business owners can contribute ideas and make concerns known

by attending public hearings and meetings, filling out comment forms, communicating with city alders, and attending meetings of neighborhood associations and local business groups. If you’re located outside the city of Madison, work with local government officials. Contact the team in charge of the project. This can usually be determined on the city’s Road Works website, cityofmadison.com/roadworks, or by calling the city’s engineering department at 266-4751. Secure individual meetings with the project’s engineers.

Business planning: what you can do 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 or consider forming one.

There's strength in numbers. 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 groups. That's a role Mary Carbine, executive director of Madison's Central Business Improvement District (BID), played. "It's hard for small businesses to find the time; we found the liaison model very effective," she says.

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.

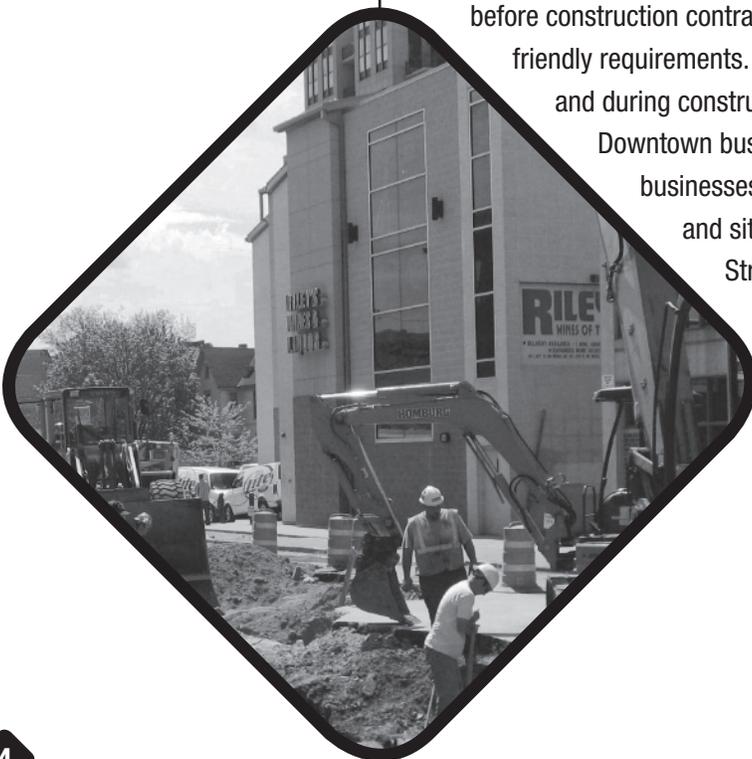
Work with neighborhood associations.

These organizations could potentially coordinate periodic communications to the community.

Work closely with city engineering staff in the pre-bid stage,

before construction contracts are written, to ensure the contracts include business-friendly requirements. These might include regularly scheduled meetings before and during construction with business owners and construction staff.

Downtown businesses negotiated requirements that sidewalk access to businesses be available at all times, that construction be suspended and sites cleaned during critical business days, such as Maxwell Street Days, and that contractors post "all businesses are open" signs.



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.

Identify marketing, advertising and design firms

in the neighborhood that might provide pro bono 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.

Use Facebook, Twitter and other social media.

These are excellent channels for providing updates and reminding customers you're open for business.

Investigate whether grants are available

through philanthropic organizations, nonprofit organizations or local government to assist with your communications campaign.

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 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.

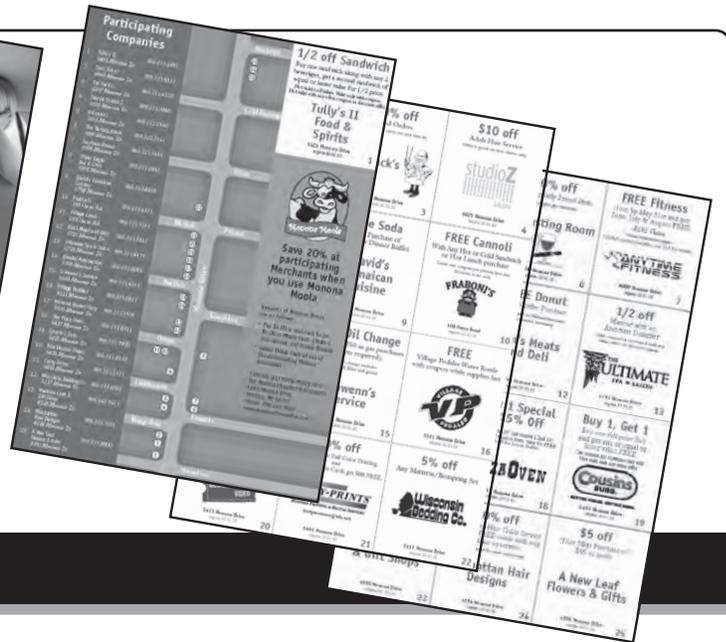
You may need to rework your budget.

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.





MONONA DRIVE'S ALIVE

Monona-area businesses and the Monona Chamber of Commerce used multiple marketing/communications efforts to attract customers during construction on Monona Drive, the area's main thoroughfare. Paul Hoffman, president/CEO of Monona State Bank had lived through construction while at another bank, and knew how hard it could be for businesses. Before construction began, he and Mark Schellpfeffer, vice president of marketing, interviewed business owners who had experienced reconstruction, and the bank's leaders developed a game plan. Initiatives included:

- Sponsored several breakfast meetings where speakers encouraged businesses to communicate proactively with customers.
- Developed coupon books usable at area businesses and distributed them countywide, and made them available on businesses' and the chamber's websites.
- Sent a newsletter, *Weather the Storm*, to customers, encouraging them to frequent area businesses.
- Named Tim Ryan, CFO and senior vice president, as the bank's liaison to the road construction group and to other area businesses. Ryan met with the group and with businesses regularly to keep all parties informed.

"Area businesses are our customers, and we wanted to help them out; that's why we created the coupons to drive business to the area," says Schellpfeffer. "Not only regular customers came, but new people also came to check it out and are now regular customers. You have to get out in front of it; you can't wait until sales go down. By then it's too late."

"The *Monona Moola* certificates were very successful; we had to keep printing them," says Schellpfeffer. In the end, many area businesses felt their business community grew stronger through the reconstruction process.

The Monona Chamber of Commerce coordinated the "Monona Drive's Alive" campaign. Bobette Handel, then-chamber president and owner of Handel Automotive Services, participated and Terri Groves, the chamber's executive director led the effort, which included:

- Regular meetings of local businesses to plan promotions.
- Emails and Facebook notices to potential customers with daily lunch and dinner specials of the week.
- Launched mononadrivesalive.com, which among other things featured a business and restaurant of the week.
- Held events that sometimes featured bands, a free park-and-ride bus loop, farmers' and craft markets, 3K run/walk, sidewalk sales, vendor booths and more.
- Distributed *Monona Moola*—certificates costing \$4 that people could redeem for \$5 at participating area businesses.

Tips for survival once construction begins

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.

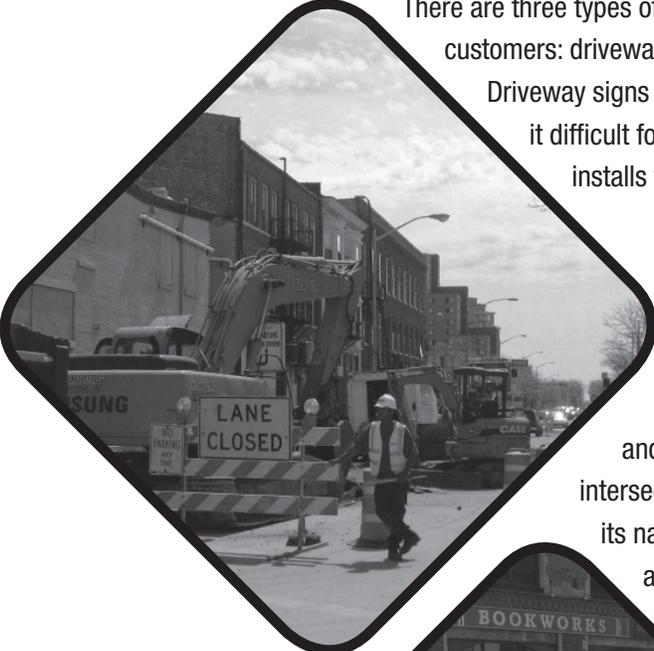
Access to your business is often a problem during a construction project. Make sure there are signs directing your customers to the right entrance.

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

and businesses may attach their name placards below these signs. The signs state "Alternate Business Access" and have an arrow on them. They're 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 alternate business access sign.



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.

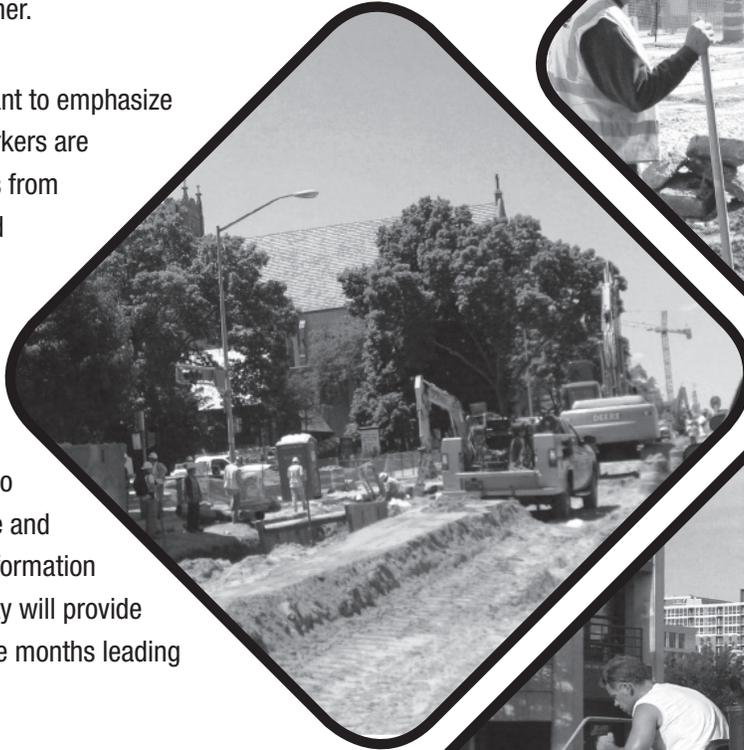
If you wish to place any of the above temporary signs—highly recommended to provide easier access for your customers during construction—you must apply for a temporary sign permit. The application form is available through the city's Road Works website, cityofmadison.com/roadworks. There's no fee for the temporary signs, but it's important that you obtain a permit prior to ordering the 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 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 continued

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 Craigslist 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 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.



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 its 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.

“Make it fun and customers will keep coming,” says Susan Bulgrin. “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.

DOWNTOWN GET-AROUND:

Madison’s Central Business Improvement District (BID) distributed periodic *Downtown Madison Get-Around Guides* to help people navigate downtown during construction. The guides listed open streets, alternative routes and available parking.

“We created a map of open and closed routes and put it on our website, and businesses kept copies by their registers so they could guide callers,” says Mary Carbine, BID’s executive director. “It was a great partnership with city engineering; they also had it on their website and their weekly email bulletins linked to it. It was a proactive way to counter the perception that you couldn’t find your way around downtown.”

Businesses capitalized on the construction theme. “One high-end clothing store sent postcards to customers about a construction sale. The postcards showed their fashionable staff in the store’s clothing wearing hard hats,” Carbine says. “They turned it into something fun.”



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 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's the time to focus on recapturing market share and winning back customers.

Consider promotions 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. 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



Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz, Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce staff and Small Business Advisory Council members joined University Avenue businesses at a ribbon-cutting to celebrate the reopening of the avenue after reconstruction.

Following the conclusion of a long and disruptive road construction project on University Avenue, the Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce sponsored a grand reopening at UW Credit Union for all businesses impacted by the project. Members of the media, elected officials, businesses and the general public were invited to attend. "The ribbon-cutting was a great opportunity to celebrate

the completed road construction project with the University Avenue businesses and their customers. It announced to the wider community that the University Avenue business corridor was better than ever and a premier shopping destination," says Bob Ansheles, GMCC's director of membership & marketing.

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



The Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce

***Small Business Advisory Council is an
advisory committee to the leadership of the***

***Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce
and the Mayor of the City of Madison.***

***The council serves as a credible voice
for the needs and concerns of small businesses
throughout the greater Madison area.***



ADDITIONAL BUSINESS RESOURCES

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

Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce (GMCC)

615 East Washington Avenue
P.O. Box 71
Madison, WI 53701-0071
(608) 256-8348
FAX: (608) 256-0333
info@greatermadisonchamber.com
greatermadisonchamber.com

Madison Development Corporation

550 W. Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53703
(608) 256-2799
mdcorp.org

Office of Business Resources

City of Madison
215 Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard
Room 312
Madison, WI 53701
(608) 267-8721
FAX: (608) 261-6126
obr@cityofmadison.com
cityofmadison.com/business/obr

Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE)

MGE Innovation Center
Lower level (suite 37)
505 S. Rosa Road
Madison, WI 53719
Monday – Friday: 9 a.m. – noon
(608) 441-2820
scoremadison145.org

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

975 University Avenue, #3260
Madison, WI 53706
Small Business Answer Line
Monday – Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.
(800) 940-7232
General SBDC information:
wisconsinsbdc.org
(608) 263-7680

Wisconsin Women's Business Initiative Corporation (WWBIC)

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

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