

The roads to recovery

Improvements well underway on streets throughout Biloxi

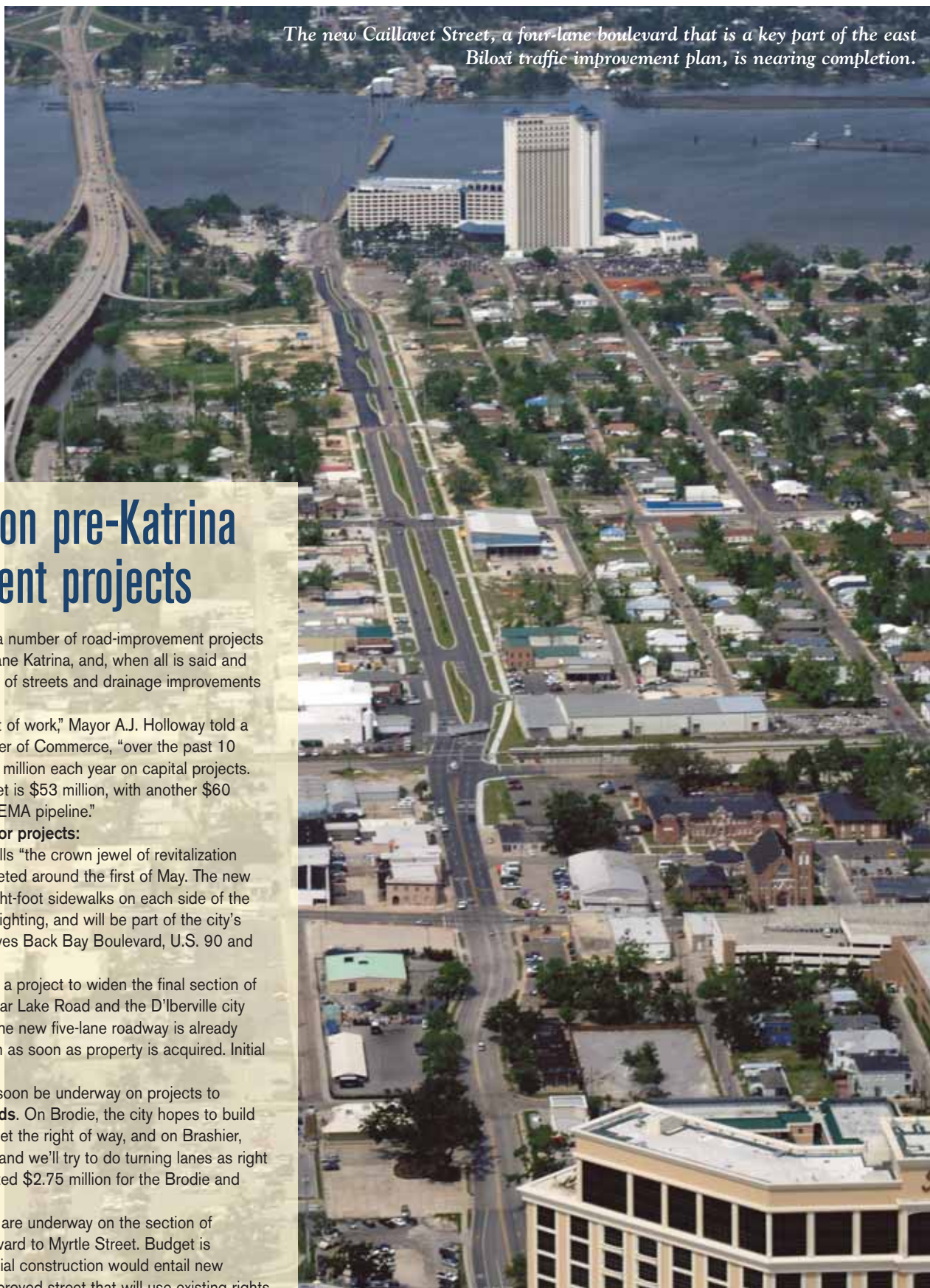
The City of Biloxi has construction underway on three of six repair contracts that will see repair and restoration of traffic signals, street lights, school crossings signs, asphalt, sidewalks, gutters and curbing on three-quarters of the streets in the city.

The \$3.5 million in work, parts of which began Sept. 25, involves 680 streets throughout the city and more than half of the work is expected to be completed by August. The city is being reimbursed by the Federal Highway Administration, FEMA and MEMA.

"This project will be at full force from March through the summer," Mayor A.J. Holloway said. "Because of the magnitude of the work, it's one of those things where you won't see the improvements all at once, but you're seeing them at a quicker pace and in more places over the next few months."

To date, more than half of the vitally needed traffic signs have been replaced or restored, and 10 percent of the damaged asphalt has been replaced.

"The biggest challenge with this work is dealing with the unknowns, the things that we could not have possibly known during the design phase," according to Jason Elliott of the firm Neel Schaffer, which is managing the four contracts. "For example, we are anticipating reusing



The new Caillavet Street, a four-lane boulevard that is a key part of the east Biloxi traffic improvement plan, is nearing completion.

Work resumes on pre-Katrina road-improvement projects

The city has re-activated work on a number of road-improvement projects that were in the works before Hurricane Katrina, and, when all is said and done, the city will have a record level of streets and drainage improvements underway.

"To give you an idea of the amount of work," Mayor A.J. Holloway told a recent gathering of the Biloxi Chamber of Commerce, "over the past 10 years, we spent an average of \$16.1 million each year on capital projects. Right now, the capital projects budget is \$53 million, with another \$60 million working its way through the FEMA pipeline."

A quick look at some of the major projects:

- **Caillavet Street**, which the city calls "the crown jewel of revitalization projects," is expected to be completed around the first of May. The new four-lane boulevard will feature eight-foot sidewalks on each side of the street, new landscaping and new lighting, and will be part of the city's east Biloxi traffic loop, which involves Back Bay Boulevard, U.S. 90 and Oak Street.
- Property acquisition has begun on a project to widen the final section of **Popp's Ferry Road**, between Cedar Lake Road and the D'Iberville city limits. Engineering and design of the new five-lane roadway is already completed. Construction will begin as soon as property is acquired. Initial budget for this work is \$250,000.
- Engineering and design work will soon be underway on projects to improve **Brodie and Brashier roads**. On Brodie, the city hopes to build two lanes maybe three if we can get the right of way, and on Brashier, we'll have two 12-foot wide lanes and we'll try to do turning lanes as right of way allows. The city has budgeted \$2.75 million for the Brodie and Brashier work.
- Engineering and design work also are underway on the section of **Howard Avenue** from MLK Boulevard to Myrtle Street. Budget is \$325,000 for the design work. Initial construction would entail new drainage and water lines on an improved street that will use existing rights of way between MLK and Keller Avenue.
- Widening of **Oaklawn Drive**, the major access roadway for the Eagle Point community, is underway and expected to be completed very soon. The work has a budget of \$650,000.
- Drainage repairs to **Balmoral Drive** in the Edgewater Park subdivision are underway and should be completed within 45 days of the start of work. Budget is \$350,000.
- Preliminary work on improving the flow of traffic across the **Popp's Ferry bridge** is now underway. Among the options: a wider and higher bridge, or a companion span to match a higher span on the existing bridge. Start of construction on the three- to five-year project would depend on funding, which was estimated to be around \$50 million, pre-Katrina. An environmental impact statement, which would identify the best of the two options, is now underway.

may have to drill new conduit under the existing roadway. Other than circumstances like that, I believe that all these projects will be straight-forward and

the underground conduit for the mast arm signals and the low mast lighting on U.S. 90.

"If this conduit is plugged with mud or debris from the storm surge, then we

relatively problem-free."

Elliott said the pre-construction phases of the project were time-consuming, given the amount of work and necessary paperwork.

"There are 630 non-federal-aid streets with some type of repair, mostly signs, and about 50 federal-aid streets," he said. "However, the federal-aid streets, which are usually longer and wider, such as Pass Road and Division Street, require an additional level of project approval, and if we don't follow the procedures, the taxpayers of Biloxi are left with the bill, which is something the Mayor has cautioned us not to let happen."

The city's Public Works Department publishes a daily traffic update on the city web site. To see it, visit biloxi.ms.us/traffic.

The traffic improvement initiative: Phase by phase

Here's a breakdown on the six phases of the city's traffic improvement initiative, according to records

from City Engineer Damon Torricelli and consulting engineer Jason Elliott of the firm Neel-Schaffer:

Phase I – \$1.6 million, SCI of Gulfport, and subcontractor PCS of Vancleave.

Work began Sept. 25 and involves repair or restoration of asphalt, sidewalks, curbing,

street signs, lighting and flashing lights on 630 neighborhood streets. All sign work except street name signs has been completed. Asphalt, sidewalk, and

curbing are about 30 percent complete. The flashing lights have been restored at Reynoir Street-Esters Boulevard and John Lee-Woolmarket roads. Roadway lighting equipment has been received and is being installed in the Miramar/Acacia area. Expected completion: July 2007.

Phase II – \$118,855, Lamey Rockco Electric of Biloxi.

Work began Nov. 11 and involves repair or restoration of traffic signals at Popp's Ferry Road and Jam Lane; Switzer and Eisenhower drives; Irish Hill Drive and White Avenue; Howard Avenue and Caillavet Street; and Howard Avenue and Reynoir Street. All five locations are operational and 99 percent of all the work has been completed. Expected completion: April 2007.

Phase III – \$824,741, Toomer Electric of Baton Rouge, La.

Work begins Jan. 22 and involves repair or restoration of roadway lighting, traffic signals, flashing lights and school-crossing signs on 50 thoroughfares known as "federal-aid roads." A large portion of the lighting to be repaired is on Highway 90 from Beauvoir Road to Rodenberg Avenue.

All school zones have been repaired and are operational. Expected completion: August 2007.

Phase IV – \$227,307, SCI of Gulfport (awarding of contract is pending)

Work involves repair or restoration of asphalt, sidewalks and curbing on 50 thoroughfares known as federal aid roads. Expected completion: 120 days from contractor's notice to proceed from the city.

Phase V – \$429,562 (awarding of contract is pending)

Work involves repairs to low mast lighting on U.S. 90 from Myrtle to Oak; and repairs to ornamental lighting on U.S. 90 from Porter to Rodenberg, Bayview Avenue from Caillavet to Main, and under I-110 overpass. Awaiting MDOT and Federal Highway Administration approvals. Submitted November 2006. Expected completion: To be announced.

Phase VI – \$227,324 (awarding of contract is pending)

Work involves replacing ornamental lighting on the pedestrian walkways throughout the Rue Magnolia area. Design work was started last week. Construction is estimated to begin sometime in the fall of this year.