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"We are continually faced by great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems."  
— Lee Iacocca, retired chairman, Chrysler Corp.

## COMMENTARY



Economic Development

## The Road to Prosperity

FOR A METROPOLIS to ensure long-term success, two criteria are essential: an abundance of college graduates and a vibrant, well-maintained city. Highly educated professionals can choose to live almost anywhere, so it's no wonder that attractive cities like New York, Denver, Chicago, London, and Paris have a sizable share of highly skilled workers.

If metro Detroit and the state of Michigan are going to compete with such regions, we can't skimp on the amenities. While the state has an excellent university network with top-flight medical, research, and engineering disciplines, it doesn't fare well on the livability scale. Downtown Detroit was largely written off after the 1967 riots, although over the last 15 years businesses and planning officials have replaced much of the blight with stadiums, residential lofts, casinos, offices, restaurants, and a riverfront promenade.

Meanwhile, vibrant suburban downtown districts like Birmingham, Rochester, Royal Oak, and Mount Clemens are vastly different from a decade ago, as new residential and entertainment offerings have been paired with storefronts and restaurants. Though the tepid economy has caused some communities to curtail improvement projects, such upgrades shouldn't be abandoned altogether, lest metro Detroit fall further behind more prosperous regions.

That's one reason Commerce Township has been steadfast in extending the M-5 corridor past Pontiac Trail to improve traffic patterns and establish an urban village. Following more than a decade of land acquisition, planning, and construction,

### INSIDE THE NUMBERS

**\$700M**

Economic activity to be generated by Commerce Township's Martin Parkway project

**8,000 jobs**

Includes 3,500 construction jobs

**330 acres**

Size of project (\$2.1M economic impact per acre)

Source:  
Commerce Township

the last phase of M-5, from 14 Mile to Pontiac Trail, was completed in 2002. But northbound traffic at the end of the eight-lane freeway is often delayed, as motorists are forced to turn at Pontiac Trail, a two-lane road running east and west.

Eager to offer residents more amenities while strengthening property values, the township created a downtown development authority to extend M-5 to the north. Scheduled for completion next year, the so-called Martin Parkway will connect to M-5, with traffic speeds of 35 mph.

"By installing ... roundabouts on Martin Parkway, the traffic will flow much better from M-5, and it sets the stage for a dense, active community nestled within 125 acres of park space," says Loren D. Crandell, president of Giffels-Webster, a civil-engineering firm hired by the township to help oversee the project. "It will be another improvement to the region."

To put the 330-acre project in motion, the township purchased two golf courses and proceeded to turn one of the clubhouses into a library, while the other is slated to become the new township hall. Six miles of walking trails are also being added, while up to 800 homes, a lifestyle center, and other amenities are on the drawing board.

Township officials estimate that after it's fully built out, the project will generate 8,000 jobs (including 3,500 construction jobs) and \$700 million in economic activity. What's more, the entire project was paid for with road funds and other public money. "There will be no increase in the tax rates to pay for the improvements," says township DDA director Wynn Berry. ■