



City of Yakima

# **News Release**

**Subject: MLK, Jr. Blvd Underpass Opening**

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## **MLK, Jr. Boulevard Underpass Open to Traffic**

The wait is over for drivers wanting to use the new MLK, Jr. Boulevard underpass in Yakima. A ribbon cutting ceremony on Wednesday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> officially marked completion of the project and the removal of detour signs around the construction area.

Local, state, and federal officials, representatives from the Yakima business community, and other project partners attended the 11:00 am ribbon cutting on July 23<sup>rd</sup> at the intersection of 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and MLK, Jr. Blvd. After the dedication ceremony, a caravan of City vehicles took the first official trip on the underpass followed by Yakima community members on foot who got a firsthand look at the new underpass.

About an hour after the ceremony finished, crews had completed final cleanup of the underpass and a section of MLK, Jr. Blvd between 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue that has been closed since the project began and the underpass was opened to normal traffic.

Construction of the underpass was expected to last through late summer or early fall this year, but relatively mild winter weather and the efficiency of contractor crews allowed the project to be completed ahead of schedule.

Mowat Construction Company, a Woodinville-based firm, served as the project's primary contractor. Work began in March 2013 on the roughly \$10.6 million underpass project.

Reopening MLK, Jr. Blvd restores a primary link to Downtown Yakima and relieves traffic congestion caused by detouring vehicles around the construction area while the underpass was being built. The part of Downtown Yakima that is home to the MLK, Jr. Blvd underpass has seen plenty of construction over the past few years. Work on the Lincoln Avenue underpass, located a block away from its MLK, Jr. Blvd sister underpass, began in 2010 and was finished in the fall of 2012.

The two Yakima underpasses had been in the planning and construction stages for more than a decade. The Washington State Congressional delegation (spearheaded by U.S. Senator Patty Murray), the 14<sup>th</sup> District state legislative delegation, and current and past Yakima City Council members played key roles in securing the majority of the needed funding from state and federal sources for construction.

BNSF also contributed more than \$1.5 million toward completion of the two underpasses.