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Fort Hamer Bridge stalled by bad weather

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PARRISH

With storm clouds from Hurricane Matthew overhead and Manatee County under a tropical storm watch, construction crews at the Fort Hamer Bridge were forced to stop work Thursday and lowered the massive cranes used for heavy lifting to prevent them from becoming sails in possible wind gusts.

Work crews are expected to return to the site Monday.

To date, 1,200 feet of bridge have been completed with another 1,100 feet to go, pushing the project past the halfway mark and on target for completion in summer of 2017, project manager Tom Charles said Thursday.

The bridge now has the start of a curve as it bends toward Upper Manatee River Road, where another crane has been located on the south bank to start work on the southern abutment.

“Construction taking place on Upper Manatee River Road includes drainage improvements, as well as improvements to the roadway. Also, (contractor) Johnson Brothers is working on reconfiguration of the traffic pattern where it is going to meet up with the south end of the bridge. All of that and the detour and traffic being opened should happen sometime in the late spring of 2017,” project spokeswoman Trudy Gerena said.

When completed, pedestrians and bicyclists will be able to cross the bridge, and stop at an overlook, about the midway point of the span. The framework of the

overlook is now in place, providing a view of the river and marsh grasses to the east.

“This is a great spot for cyclists and pedestrians to take a break and enjoy a view of the river,” Gerena said.

The acquisition of a third crane will allow work to start earlier than expected on the south abutment, Charles said.

Work on the diverging diamond at University Parkway and Interstate 75 and other Florida Department of Transportation projects also was halted by the threat of Hurricane Matthew.

Construction started in March of 2015 on the \$23.5 million bridge, which when completed will provide a new north-south corridor connecting Lakewood Ranch and Parrish, and could be valuable in handling traffic in future storms.

Associated with the bridge project are \$6.5 million in improvements to Fort Hamer Road and \$2.7 million in improvements to Upper Manatee River Road.

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