

\$32.69 million Fort Hamer Bridge project moving pier by pier closer to the Manatee River

BY JAMES A. JONES JR.

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Nathan Knorr does survey work for the Fort Hamer Bridge project Thursday. JAMES A. JONES JR./Bradenton Herald

PARRISH -- Within the next six months, Fort Hamer Bridge contractor Johnson Bros. Corp. should have piers erected 1,000 feet into the Manatee River.

Eventually, 19 piers will span the river, including two on the ends called "bents." Piers and bents are vertical structures to support the bridge deck, or driving surface.

Discussions about putting a bridge over Manatee River at Fort Hamer are about 100 years old. As recently as 2001, there were discussions about building a six-lane bridge there.

Concerns from neighbors and environmentalists eventually led to the proposed span being downsized to two lanes.

Five vertical piles on the north side of the river now mark the start of the bridge, which engineers refer to as "end bent 19."

The next pier is No. 18 where the footer is being poured over the pilings, and pier 17 about 25 feet from the water's edge, where pilings are being driven, said Trudy Gerena, project spokeswoman.

Pier 16 will be the first pier actually in the water.

Just how deep each pile must be driven for the \$23.5 million bridge varies, Gerena said.

"They drive them until they become stable and don't go anymore," she said.

All told, the project will cost \$32.69 million, including improvements to Upper Manatee River Road and Fort Hamer Road.

Improvements to Fort Hamer Road have already started between Britt Road and Golf Course Road. The contractor is expected to begin hauling earth to the site soon to build up the approach to the bridge.

Fort Hamer Bridge is being built north to south, essentially from Fort Hamer to near Waterlefe.

To accommodate construction of the concrete bridge, the contractor will install a temporary bridge as a working platform.

The first asphalt will be applied on the west side of Fort Hamer Road to allow traffic flow unimpeded, followed by the east side, Gerena said.

Crews are also doing clearing for the project and installing storm drain pipe.

Norma Kennedy, whose home fronts onto Fort Hamer Road where improvements are being made, took the work in stride Friday.

"They made a mess out of my driveway for three days, but they are being very accommodating, and doing it in sections so that they don't disrupt everything," Kennedy said. "I have mixed emotions about the bridge because of the traffic increase. But I believe we need the bridge. I am especially concerned about when they push Fort Hamer Road through to Moccasin Wallow Road. I'm afraid that bypass will cause us to lose Parrish."

Construction hours are 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays.

The Fort Hamer Bridge will have two lanes for auto traffic, bike lanes, sidewalk on the east side and turn lanes at the north and south approaches.

Fort Hamer Road and Upper Manatee River Road will get sidewalks, paved bike lanes, grass shoulders, right- and left-turn lanes, resurfacing and widening to 24 feet.

Groundbreaking for the project was in March. Completion is expected in early 2017.

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Read more here: <http://www.bradenton.com/2015/06/07/5837784/3269-million-fort-hamer-bridge.html#storylink=cpy>