

Pile driving to start Monday for Fort Hamer Bridge in East Manatee

By JAMES A. JONES JR.

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Construction workers set up beams this week, preparing to start pile driving Monday for the Fort Hamer Bridge. JAMES A. JONES JR./Bradenton Herald

EAST MANATEE -- Pile driving for construction of the Fort Hamer Bridge is scheduled to begin Monday.

Construction workers, working with a giant crane, this week stood on huge steel beams on end on the north side of the Manatee River, adjacent to Fort Hamer Park.

"They are going to start the test piles for the north landing. They have to drive the piles into the ground until they meet a point of resistance. That's how they make their template for how large the piles need to be for the landing," project spokeswoman Trudy Gerena said Thursday.

All of the pile driving will be in the daytime.

After decades of planning and maneuvering through government red tape, ground breaking for the project was held in March.

Altogether, a 5.5-mile section of roadway, including the two-lane bridge and improvements to Fort Hamer Road and Upper Manatee River Road, is expected to cost more than \$32 million.

The decision to start construction on the north side of the river was based on the location chosen by contractor Johnson Brothers for its staging area near Fort Hamer Park, Gerena said.

Over time, the contractor will drive test piles from the north side of the river, along the path of the bridge across the Manatee River, to the landing site on the south side of the river.

Johnson Brothers also has installed a silt fence from Golf Course Road north to Britt Road and will be doing some drainage work along that portion of Fort Hamer Road starting Monday, Gerena said.

More clearing of shrubs and trees is planned to remove vegetation from the site of the north landing.

The proposed completion date for bridge and road improvements is early 2017. Once the bridge is open, it will essentially connect Parrish with Lakewood Ranch, and give Manatee County motorists another north-south corridor.

The project will also add bike lanes, grassed shoulders, sidewalks, and milling and resurfacing of existing pavement, Ron Schulhofer, public works director, said in a memorandum to county commissioners in April.

Funding for the project is from 2004 transportation bonds and impact fees.

Discussions about building a bridge started in 1909, meaning that virtually no one living at the time is still alive.

"One hundred six years in the making: I am very humbled to be a part of such an important process," Schulhofer said during the groundbreaking.

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Read more here: <http://www.bradenton.com/2015/05/01/5774513/pile-driving-to-start-monday-for.html#storylink=cpy>