

# Officials hear questions, complaints about Fort Hamer Bridge project

BY CLAIRE ARONSON

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Manatee County held a public information meeting Thursday in East Manatee to answer questions about Fort Hamer Bridge.

Video by Claire Aronson, Bradenton Herald. Bradenton.com **BRADENTON HERALD**



MANATEE -- A week after Manatee County broke ground on the Fort Hamer Bridge, county staff held a public meeting in the Haile Middle School cafeteria Thursday to answer questions and hear complaints about the project.

The bridge will link Parrish and Lakewood Ranch. Construction is expected to be completed in 2017.

"We wanted to let the community be aware that construction is about to start so they are not caught off guard," said Trudy Gerena, who does public outreach for Manatee County. "Now that plans are 100 percent complete, we can answer specifics and questions they had during the design phase and finally see the final results."

Many residents on both sides of the Manatee River came to express concerns and ask questions about the two-lane bridge, which will have bike lanes and a sidewalk on its east side.

Waterlefe resident Joe Groelly's house abuts the bridge where it ends on the south side. Groelly said he is the "most impacted."

"They are doing nothing for noise abatement," he said Thursday. "At least do something for my goodwill. The value of my house is going down \$200,000 and I can't sell it."

Fellow Waterlefe resident Sue McCarty came to find out bridge and road improvement specifics.

"Its been very helpful," she said of the meeting. "I know it is necessary but we are not excited because it is in our backyards. I've seen (Interstate 75 and U.S. 301) at 5 p.m."

Joe and Barbara Burt live on the north side of the river in River Wilderness. While they say they see the benefit of the bridge, they are also concerned with the speed and expected increase in traffic on the road.

"Right now, it is not heavily trafficked," Barbara Burt said, suggesting the speed limit on Fort Hamer Road be reduced to 30 mph from 45 mph.

Joe Burt said there are positives and negatives about the bridge.

"At first, I was fairly against it," he said. "It definitely has a lot of benefits but they do have to take care of things, as well."

The bridge will span the Manatee River connecting Upper Manatee River Road on the south side and Fort Hamer Road on the north. When completed, the bridge will create a north-south alternative to I-75 and provide a more direct route for Parrish residents to Lakewood Ranch.

Work on the bridge and improvements along Fort Hamer and Upper Manatee River roads started last week. Manatee County public works director Ron Schulhofer has told the Bradenton Herald he expects work to kick into full gear in the next 45 days.

Johnson Brothers Corp. of Hillsborough County was awarded the \$32.7 million construction contract last month. The company will build the bridge and improvements along Fort Hamer and Upper Manatee River roads. Road improvements include additional sidewalks, bike lanes, turn lanes and pavement resurfacing. Fort Hamer Road will also be widened.

Connie Mitchell, who lives in Greyhawk Landing on the south side of river, said she is looking forward to the improvements, especially the bike lane on Upper Manatee River Road.

"It is going to happen," she said. "Take the lemons and make lemonade."

Information: [forthamerbridge.com](http://forthamerbridge.com).

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Read more here: <http://www.bradenton.com/2015/03/26/5714190/fort-hamer-bridge-questions-complaints.html#storylink=cpy>