

Fort Hamer Bridge project moves forward

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MANATEE COUNTY-- After more than 10 years of back and forth, the Fort Hamer Bridge is finally set for construction. Crews could be on site as early as March 16th.

"The Fort Hamer Bridge has been in the projects for as long as I can remember, and I've been out there for 38 years," said **Manatee County** residents Mark Stuckey.

Stuckey is among the many residents excited about the prospect of a new way to get across the **Manatee River**. The Fort Hamer Bridge will

connect upper Manatee River Road to **Fort Hamer Road**. Many in favor of the bridge say it will cut the driving time from **Bradenton** to **Parrish** in half. They also say it will help redirect traffic off the interstate.

"They definitely need a link between parish and getting traffic alleviated off I-75," added Stuckey. Relieving day to day interstate congestion is one of the many reasons county commissioners voted to move forward with the project.

"If you have ever seen I-75 when something happens or when there's a back up, you're very limited in the crossing over **Manatee River**, so that's going to be a huge bonus for the county, because there will be that extra connection," said Kent Bontrager from **Manatee County**.

In addition, the county says the Fort Hamer bridge will decrease their 911 emergency response time. It will also aid in easing traffic flow during a mass evacuation in times of emergency. Despite the benefits, the Fort Hamer Bridge did come without some controversy.

"The main thing was the aesthetics and the noise that the residents that are right there are going to be concerned with," added Bontrager.

The community's opinion is just one thing the county had to tackle.

"We've been working on it for about 10 years. It just took a long time to get it permitted," said Bontrager. "There was just a lot of things to address, a lot of things we had to mitigate, but we're there now and we're excited about moving forward."

One thing's for sure: Thousands of residents are anxiously awaiting the day they'll have another means of crossing the **Manatee River**.

"Let them get it done -- I hope they get it done soon than they are anticipating," Stuckey. The project is expected to cost \$32.7 million and will take about 21 months to complete.