

Fort Hamer Bridge takes on new look as it moves into Manatee River

BY JAMES A. JONES JR.

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Read more here: http://www.bradenton.com/2015/09/20/6000372_fort-hamer-bridge-takes-on-new.html?rh=1#storylink=cpy

PARRISH -- It's beginning to look a lot like a bridge.

Since breaking ground on the Fort Hamer Bridge project in March, construction crews have poured three sets of piers and the end bent, or northern terminus, and placed the first five horizontal I-beams. The most recent set of piers poured were the first to actually be placed in the Manatee River.

The real story might be the rain gauges engineers set out at the construction shack. "We have had 31 inches of rain since June 1," said Justin Hogan, an engineer assigned to the project by contractor Johnson Brothers Corp. of Orlando.

Kent Bontrager, Manatee County project engineer for the bridge, made his final visit to the site Friday before moving on to a new job at Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport. "The project has been good so far, but the rain makes everything so wet you can't work," Bontrager said. Some days, the contractor sends construction workers home because of the rain, and other days must do work-arounds. One example is the northern bridge terminus. Normally, the contractor would place the first of the horizontal I-beams from the terminus to the first set of piers. The ground has been so saturated around the terminus the first set of I-beams were placed over another span instead, project manager Tom Charles said.

Once the ground dries out, the contractor will be able to install I-beams weighing 166,000 pounds each between the terminus and the first set of piers. The I-beams are so huge it requires two massive cranes to set them in place.

Bridge work on schedule

Despite the rain, the bridge is on schedule to be completed by early 2017. From atop the temporary bridge running parallel to the new concrete piers, which supports one of the pile-driving cranes, Charles pointed out markers in the water near an island in the Manatee River. The bridge will be extended in a near straight line to the island and begin to curve toward the west once it hits a line of trees. It will land on the south shore of the river near the Waterlefe neighborhood.

Johnson Brothers Corp. specializes primarily in marine projects and bridges. "Every one of these projects is different. It keeps the job interesting," Charles said. With the Fort Hamer Bridge, a span of relatively shallow water is followed by an island and a span of slightly deeper water to the south, Charles said.

Once the approach to Fort Hamer Bridge is completed it will be used to facilitate bridge construction, Charles said.

The estimated cost of the bridge and improvements to Fort Hamer Road and Upper Manatee River Road is \$32.69 million. Engineers calculate the bridge is about 18 percent complete.

Park improvements set

Although not directly related to the bridge project, Manatee County commissioners are scheduled Sept. 22 to award a contract for Fort Hamer Park Phase IIA improvements to Gator Grading and Paving LLC of Palmetto. Gator bid \$1,051,144 to expand and pave the boat trailer parking area and add vehicle and handicap-accessible parking, lighting, irrigation, landscaping, and drainage. Gator also will construct retention and floodplain compensation areas.



Trudy Gerena, Tom Charles, and Justin Hogan walk on a temporary bridge used for construction of the Fort Hamer Bridge. To the right is the first set of piers with footers in the water of the Manatee River.



Concrete will be poured over these I-beams to provide the driving surface on the Fort Hamer Bridge.



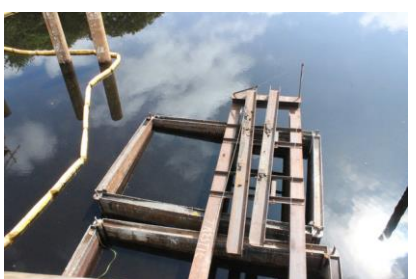
Three sets of piers have been poured for the new bridge over the Manatee River.



A new approach to the Fort Hamer Bridge is being developed and will help speed completion of the project.



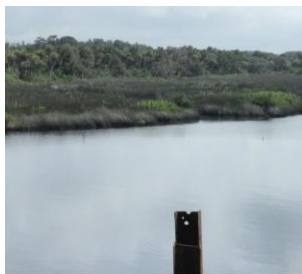
Two cranes are needed to lift and position the massive I-beams which provide the horizontal surface for the Fort Hamer Bridge.



These forms are used to de-water places where footings will be poured for the Fort Hamer Bridge.



Forms used to pour concrete for a set of piers for the Fort Hamer Bridge may soon be removed.



Markers near an island in the Manatee River show where the Fort Hamer Bridge will be extended toward the river's southern bank.



The ground around the northern terminus will need to dry out before cranes can position I-beams to connect it with the nearest set of piers.

Claire Aronson, Manatee County reporter, contributed to this report.

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