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# Fort Hamer Bridge a little closer to completion

Drivers should be using new span to travel between Parrish and Lakewood Ranch by summer 2017. **James A. Jones Jr.** Bradenton Herald

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## PARRISH

Ten, nine, eight, seven . . .

It's the countdown to the completion of the 19 piers that support the Fort Hamer Bridge.

Construction crews this week worked on pier No. 7, leaving only six more to go.

Completion of the two-lane bridge, costing \$23.9 million, is forecast for summer of 2017.

Project manager Tom Charles and project spokeswoman Trudy Gerena stood at the end of the construction trestle and looked toward the south shore of the Manatee River, which seemed tantalizingly close.

Heavy machinery on the far end of the river stirred up dust as the contractor, Johnson Brothers, worked on the end bent — the pier that will anchor the bridge on the south — and the 1,800-foot Fort Hamer Road extension reaching to Upper Manatee River Road.

Construction workers can already park their trucks on 1,200 feet of concrete of bridge extending from the north shore, or Parrish side of the river.

“My goal is to get to 1,337 feet by Christmas. We have already started on end bent one, and piers one and two,” Charles said. “The finish line is in view for sure.”

When completed, the bridge will be 2,318 feet long and include an overlook, or rest stop, for pedestrians and runners on its north side.

The bridge will for the first time provide a north-south corridor between Parrish and Lakewood Ranch. The cost of the road improvements to make that straight shot possible includes \$6.49 million for Fort Hamer Road and \$2.7 million for Upper Manatee River Road.

“On the south side, a lot of the curbs and sidewalks are already completed,” Gerena said.

Residents on both sides of the river are paying attention, too.

Ben Jordan, president of the Parrish Civic Association, said 10K and 5K races are being planned across the bridge on July 22 to celebrate the opening of the new span.

Construction of the bridge started in March 2015.

Fort Hamer takes its name from a U.S. Army fort built in 1849. It was one of a string of forts used to protect white settlers from attacks by native people.

A bridge was proposed at Fort Hamer for the first time more than 100 years ago.

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