

I-244 bridge project on track

by D. Ray Tuttle

Published: February 14th, 2012



Workers prepare to pour a bridge pier on the I-244 Arkansas River overpass near downtown Tulsa. (Rip Stell)

TULSA – An engineer with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation said that construction on the Interstate 244 bridge over the Arkansas River southwest of downtown Tulsa is about 34 percent complete.

“We are less than a year into construction and are on track to complete the project by the spring of 2013,” said Bruce Arnold, an engineer with the ODOT’s Field Division 8, which covers Tulsa, during a phone interview Tuesday. “The winter has been pretty good to us.”

The multimodal bridge, capable of carrying cars, trucks and trains, is the first of its kind in the state, Arnold said.

A 44-year-old, 3,296-foot-long bridge over the Arkansas River came down last summer. It is being replaced with a double-decker bridge that will incorporate highway lanes, rail lines and access for pedestrians and bicycles. Including road connection work, the project will be nearly a mile long.

“It is a good to be associated with a project like this,” Arnold said. “We look forward to its completion and the benefits it will provide the Tulsa metro.”

Having the infrastructure in place is expected to help secure funding for a high-speed rail line into Tulsa, ODOT spokeswoman Kenna Mitchell said.

A study to examine the rail corridor between Tulsa and Oklahoma City is close to beginning, she said.

“We do not have a crystal ball, so we cannot foresee when there will be rail service, but having the crossing over the river will be a huge advantage, because if we do get to that point of having rail, then we have that piece of infrastructure in place,” Mitchell said.

Manhattan Road and Bridge Co. has demolished the bridge and erected the piers for the decking. Manhattan Road and Bridge was awarded the project in March 2011 and it was the second-largest contract ever issued by ODOT. The costs include \$64 million for construction and \$14 million for construction time, bringing the total bid to \$78 million.

The detour routes constructed on the south bridge have been working as designed, causing few delays, Mitchell said.

“It is one of the longest detours in Tulsa and traffic seems to be adjusted to it,” she said.

Crews have drilled the shafts and the columns are in place, Arnold said.

“Now they are working at building the pier caps and in some areas have two pier caps to support the two levels of traffic,” Arnold said.

The north bridge is higher than the south bridge, where traffic has been diverted, he said.

“People on the north bridge will be able to look down on traffic,” Arnold said.

With the spring comes more water down the Arkansas River.

Manhattan and ODOT have worked with federal agencies like the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality to obtain necessary permits to work in the riverbed, Mitchell said. The permits are necessary to work in the Arkansas River channel.

"There is a haul road that is built above the water level, so that crews are working above the waterline," Arnold said. "We hope to remain above the water."

This spring crews will begin working on the east bank, erecting a wall to stabilize the bank, Arnold said.

Crews will pound and drill 60-foot rods, called soil nails, into the east bank.

"The soil nails will go back into the bank to anchor and hold the embankment in place," Arnold said.

Complete URL: <http://journalrecord.com/2012/02/14/i-244-bridge-project-on-track-general-news/>