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Dignitaries Dedicate First Phase of I-40 Crosstown Reconstruction

State and civic leaders Thursday hailed completion of the first phase in construction of the new I-40 Crosstown, commending nearly 12 years of planning and cooperation involving state, local and federal governments along with civic groups.

With Thursday's dedication, dignitaries commemorated a project a year and a half in the making at a cost of \$6.8 million. The City of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce, Oklahoma Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration and Congress have all contributed to the project.

The event, located at the Regatta Pavilion near the Chesapeake Boathouse on the Oklahoma River, included Governor Brad Henry, Oklahoma City Mayor Mick Cornett, Congresswoman Mary Fallin, vice president of government relations Dean Schirf of the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce and ODOT Director Gary Ridley.

Although not visible to current traffic, this first in a series of projects consisted of two interstate bridges and a railroad bridge nearly five blocks south of the existing Crosstown. Stretching four and a half miles, from May Avenue to I-235, the entire Crosstown project will incorporate 10 lanes and establish an additional four to six-lane boulevard into downtown.

In addressing critical functions of the current I-40 Crosstown, Governor Brad Henry discussed the impact of the project on all Oklahomans.

"Interstate-40 brings us commerce and connects us with the nation; phase one is just the first of many milestones," Henry said. "This project is monumental for the people of Oklahoma. It will increase safety for Oklahomans and those traveling through our state."

ODOT and city officials said the Crosstown project is the largest in Oklahoma and I-40 holds national significance as one of the nation's few all-weather, coast-to-coast routes. Congresswoman Mary Fallin said the project is critical for the state and nation.

"We are proud of Oklahoma City and proud of Oklahoma," Fallin said. "In the year of our Centennial, these projects illustrate Oklahoma's progress and the achievement of Oklahoma City."

Cornett, Ridley and Schirf agreed this phase is a pivotal first step in uniting ODOT and city projects. The completion and location of the Crosstown's first phase permits the city to consider canal and river projects that would not otherwise be possible.

"We appreciate ODOT's cooperation with all projects associated with the I-40 relocation," Mayor Cornett said. "We are excited to commemorate this milestone in the construction."

The new boulevard will provide Oklahoma City the opportunity to create a beautiful first impression for visitors. The thoroughfare will allow for economic growth, and with 12 ports to downtown Oklahoma City's entertainment district will continue to blossom.

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Further, Schirf said the Oklahoma City Chamber's involvement will enhance both city and ODOT projects, creating a more effective work plan.

"We are excited about the progress of the Crosstown," Schirf said. "Driver's can't see construction, but that is the beauty of the project. This area is vastly different and there has yet to be roadway congestion."

With Crosstown reconstruction located south of the existing I-40 bridge, crews work without lane closures and upcoming projects will minimally affect interstate traffic.

Ridley said Crosstown reconstruction is possible through Congressional appropriations from the federal Highway Trust Fund.

"The project is a critical necessity for the state and southwestern United States and without the help of our Congressional delegation it would have been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get as far as we are," Ridley said. "Senator Inhofe, as chairman of the Environmental and Public Works Committee, was instrumental in providing funding for the projects, along with Oklahoma's Congressional delegation.

"Funding has enabled us, along with our regular federal funds, to have adequate money to rebuild the current I-40 Crosstown to just north of the river," Ridley said. "Governor Henry and the Oklahoma Transportation Commission are committed to completing the rebuilding of I-40."

John Bowman, ODOT Crosstown development engineer, said the next stage will begin in several weeks with the construction of a permanent rail road bridge, followed by a series of earthwork projects to be let throughout the next year.

Originally built in 1965, the Crosstown currently carries 120,000 vehicles per day, nearly 50,000 over the intended capacity of 72,000. The new highway, designed to be ground-level or a semi-depressed roadway, will carry up to 173,000 vehicles per day. The reconstructed Crosstown is expected to be open to traffic in 2012 and is estimated at \$557 million.

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(Editors and News Directors: For more information call ODOT Public Affairs at 405-521-6000.)