



Two cities now one community again as Purcell/Lexington bridge reopens

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Friday the 13th can actually be good luck, just ask the residents of Purcell and Lexington. They are breathing a sigh of relief with today's official reopening of the James C. Nance bridge, which connects this close-knit community. The US-77/SH-39 bridge had been closed to all traffic since Jan. 31 for emergency repairs by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.

"Overcoming this challenge and reopening this bridge is an example of what Oklahomans can accomplish when we work together," Gov. Mary Fallin said. "The patience and resolve of the people of Purcell and Lexington, through this ordeal, has been truly amazing, and this day belongs to them."

In her emergency declaration, the governor called for the safe reopening of the bridge as quickly as possible. Both Gov. Fallin and ODOT remained concerned about the impact of the closure on the community and expedited the project. Even with the additional problems, the bridge was reopened in less than five months, a process that would have normally taken a year. The governor and ODOT are thankful for the community's cooperation and support.

"This was an unprecedented challenge in ODOT's history and one that has tested us all," ODOT Executive Director Mike Patterson said. "Through a great team effort between the local community, construction contractors, engineering consultants, transit operators and ODOT employees, the bridge is safe and we are happy to reopen this vital transportation link."

While the bridge is now open to regular passenger car traffic, the weight limit on trucks will remain restricted to 15 tons until ODOT has been able to evaluate the performance of the repairs under car traffic in the next two months. Work under and around the bridge will also continue for several weeks, but will not affect traffic.

The two towns sit on opposite sides of the South Canadian River and railroad, less than one mile apart. The closure of the bridge caused great hardships for the people and businesses of both towns, including a detour that turned what had been a quick 10 minute drive into a 45 minute trek on the interstate through Norman. To help ease the burden of the long commute, ODOT provided a free shuttle service, with nearly 11,000 riders traveling between Purcell and Lexington. The shuttle's final departures from Purcell and Lexington are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. and 7:45 p.m. tonight, respectively.

"We've looked forward to this day for a long time and our businesses are very excited to welcome all of their customers back," Justina Reaves, Executive Director of The Heart of Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce said.

The bridge was closed after ODOT found 11 cracks in areas of the bridge beams associated with welds made on an unusual type of manganese steel during a nearly-completed project. A contract for emergency bridge repairs was expedited and awarded on Feb. 14, and included unprecedented time-based financial incentives and disincentives. While initially hopeful of a quick repair process, ODOT was unable to open the bridge early, as the number of cracks grew to more than 100.

In April, more cracks were found in affected areas of the bridge, requiring additional specially-fabricated support plates to be produced out-of-state and shipped to the bridge for installation. The contractor, Manhattan Road and Bridge Co., working with Sherwood Construction, repaired more than 1,000 weakened areas with brackets, tension rods and repair plates at a cost of more than \$20 million from ODOT's contingency fund.

The bridge was built in 1938 and carries about 10,000 vehicles a day. Construction of a new bridge has been expedited by ODOT to within the next five years, with right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation occurring prior.

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(Editors and News Directors: Photos of the bridge are available for download at www.okladot.state.ok.us/newsmedia/press. For more information, call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Division at 405-521-6000.)

INFORMATION RELEASE

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The James C. Nance bridge between Purcell and Lexington was reopened on Friday, June 13 during a celebration hosted by The Heart of Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce. The bridge had been closed since Jan. 31 for emergency repairs by the Oklahoma Department of Transportation.



After reopening of the Purcell/Lexington bridge, Purcell Mayor David Lee and Lexington City Manager Charlie McCown were presented with plaques commemorating the occasion. Pictured, from left, are Sen. John Sparks, Gov. Mary Fallin, Heart of Oklahoma Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Justina Reaves, Lee, Purcell City Manager Dale Bunn, McCown, Oklahoma Department of Transportation Executive Director Mike Patterson, State Rep. Lisa Billy and State Rep. Bobby Cleveland.