



Celebration signals I-244/Arkansas River bridge project nearing completion

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A red ribbon gives the green light for traffic to start returning to normal across the Arkansas River in Tulsa. Both the east and westbound I-244 bridges have been replaced, and on Monday, Sept. 15, crews began removing the first of the detour routes in this corridor and allowing traffic to drive onto the new eastbound bridge for the first time. United States Deputy Secretary of Transportation Victor Mendez, Governor Mary Fallin, Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Gary Ridley and Oklahoma Department of Transportation Executive Director Mike Patterson joined with state and local leaders to cut a ribbon and dedicate the new bridges just before the traffic switch.

“This is a great day for Tulsa as we celebrate the restoration of this link across the Arkansas River,” Gov. Fallin said. “These innovative bridge projects are improving safety while opening the door to future development for Tulsa and the state.”

The I-244 bridges over the Arkansas River were built in 1967 and prior to replacement were considered structurally deficient. In 2010, ODOT was awarded a nearly \$50 million TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant to replace the westbound I-244 structure with a multimodal bridge. This grant cycle was extremely competitive and the I-244 project was considered one of the top projects in the country to receive funds. Combined with other federal funding, this \$78 million project began in 2011 and was a first-of-its-kind construction for ODOT. The new double decker bridge incorporates highway traffic on the top deck with two dedicated future rail lines and an area for bicycle and pedestrian traffic on the lower level.

“There has been a tremendous momentum underway with the highway and bridge projects in Tulsa and it is exciting to be here today to see the results of this hard work in person,” Deputy Secretary Mendez said. “I commend ODOT for continuing its efforts to improve the safety for travelers and businesses in this vital corridor and in rebuilding this key piece of infrastructure with an eye toward the future.”

The \$41 million eastbound I-244 bridge replacement project began in June 2013 and is expected to be complete in spring 2015. The new structure will include a platform under the bridge which extends about 300 feet out from the north river bank. From here, pedestrians and cyclists will have a vantage point to see the historic Cyrus Avery Route 66 Memorial Bridge and nearby plaza. Extensive work is also underway to rebuild and connect the existing River Parks trail system to this platform and also to the pedestrian crossing on the westbound I-244 bridge.

“These two old I-244 bridges were some of the worst we had on the interstate system and it cost about \$1 million a year just to maintain those structures,” Ridley said. “It was critical to replace them and ODOT was able to accelerate these projects thanks to the TIGER grant and recent increases in funding from the legislature and governor. Without that help and the continued commitment by Senator Jim Inhofe and the Oklahoma congressional delegation, we would still be facing years of continued maintenance and repairs in this corridor.”

While the eastbound I-244 bridge opened to traffic, there will still be some lane and ramp closures remaining in this area for several weeks. Crews from Manhattan Road and Bridge Company will remove detours and shift traffic, along with completing sign work as final lane configurations are put into place. Drivers are urged to pay close attention to the changes in the work zone and to plan ahead for delays.

INFORMATION RELEASE

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“Projects of this magnitude are challenging for the public because of the changes to their daily drive over the span of years in some cases,” Patterson said. “Drivers in Tulsa have certainly had a number of these large-scale projects recently and we’re glad to be removing one more work zone from their route. We can’t thank Tulsans enough for their patience as ODOT continues to improve the safety and efficiency of the highway system in the area.”

The I-244 bridges are an important highway link across the Arkansas River in Tulsa with nearly 70,000 vehicles per day in this corridor. The replacements follow another recent improvement just north of the bridges, which was a \$75 million stimulus-funded pavement reconstruction project on the north and west legs of the Inner Dispersal Loop in 2009. New decks were placed on more than 40 bridges and safety upgrades in the corridor included reconstruction of the barrier walls and installation of new lights and traffic signs.

“The replacement of the I-244 bridges at the Arkansas River and the reconstruction on the IDL are among the largest projects in the department’s history for a combined total investment of around \$195 million,” Oklahoma Transportation Commissioner Pete Regan said. “While this meant orange barrels and detours around downtown for the past five years, the hard work now will be a benefit to drivers for decades to come.”

The Tulsa Regional Chamber helped host Monday’s ribbon cutting and noted how the dedication for the new I-244 bridges at the Arkansas River comes on the heels of another big milestone for highway projects in Tulsa. The Lewis Ave. bridge over I-44 opened in August and is part of the final phase for a nearly \$400 million widening project on I-44 between Riverside Dr. and Yale Avenue.

“The investments in infrastructure and safety improvements are transforming not just the highway lanes and bridges, but benefitting the city in more ways than one,” Tulsa Mayor Dewey F. Bartlett Jr. said. “Motorists in the I-244 corridor are traveling on safer, more modern structures and bicyclists and pedestrians will now have another trail underneath the bridge for crossing the Arkansas River which also improves the connectivity of Tulsa’s trail system.”

Drivers are encouraged to continue checking the Traffic Advisories section of www.okladot.state.ok.us for daily information on lane and ramp closures in the I-244 corridor. The trail system and pedestrian areas along the I-244/Arkansas River bridges are expected to open to the public by spring of 2015.

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(Editors and News Directors: For more information, please call the ODOT Media and Public Relations Office at 405-521-6000.)



Photo 1 - A red ribbon is cut to dedicate the new east and westbound I-244 bridges over the Arkansas River in Tulsa, and to celebrate the opening of the new eastbound I-244 bridge to traffic. Joining in the dedication are {from left} Oklahoma Secretary of Transportation Gary Ridley, Tulsa Regional Chamber Senior Vice President of Government Affairs Skye McNeil, Oklahoma Transportation Commissioner Pete Regan, Governor Mary Fallin, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Transportation Victor Mendez, Tulsa Mayor Dewey Bartlett and Oklahoma Department of Transportation Executive Director Mike Patterson.



Photo 2 - The first traffic is allowed onto the new eastbound I-244 bridge over the Arkansas River in Tulsa early Monday afternoon. The eastbound bridge had been closed to traffic since the summer of 2013 as part of a \$41 million replacement project. Overall completion is scheduled for spring 2015.