



Construction workers put down rock Friday for the road bed on the Crosstown Expressway project.

PHOTOS BY DAVID MCDANIEL, THE OKLAHOMAN

I-40 work is on fast track to completion

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Construction crews pour concrete over exposed rebar on top of the Walker Street bridge in Oklahoma City. The bridge overlooks an expansive 10-lane interstate construction project, busy with traffic from dump trucks and earthmovers.

The new, four-mile Crosstown Expressway, the most expensive road project in state history, is projected to open next summer, a few months ahead of schedule.

"We're coming to the last leg of the race," state Transportation Department Division Engineer Paul Green said.

Crews working on the \$670 million project have completed 19 of the 23 individual jobs that make up the new expressway. Three remaining portions still are under construction, and the final piece will be put out for bid in July.

The east and west ends of the main corridor are finished. The middle part of the corridor is paved except for one section. Medians are still being constructed. Walls enclosing the north side of the highway still lack graffiti-proof paint. On-and-off ramps are under construction, officials said.

But opening the new interstate in 2012 will not bring an end to construction for I-40 drivers.

"That's just the day we get them off the old bridge," said Green.

Traffic will be set in temporary configurations while work is done on the I-40 and I-44 junction on the west side as well as Interstate 35, I-40 and I-235 junctions on the east side of the corridor.

Immediately after the opening of the new Crosstown Expressway, deconstruction of the old elevated roadway will begin.

The new interstate is five blocks south of the current Crosstown Expressway.

The current expressway is a dilapidated version of its former self. Built back in 1966, the two-mile stretch of bridge was the first of its kind in Oklahoma.

Builders speculated the expressway would last 50 years. Construction cost \$12.6 million, a small fraction of the price of its successor 45 years later.

In the past decade, repair crews regularly obstruct traffic to patch sections of roadway, which break off and fall to the ground below. The bridge has raised safety concerns, though Transportation Department officials reassure drivers that the current bridge is safe.

Construction on the new expressway started in late 2005. Federal funding problems delayed parts of construction in 2008. Issues with relocating part of the Oklahoma City railway line delayed work in 2009.

Completion of the 7-year project will unleash another wave of construction barrels and heavy machinery into downtown.

The old Crosstown will be replaced with a six-lane boulevard that is part of MAPS 3, a plan to breathe life into the area south of downtown.



Construction workers pour concrete Friday on the Walker Avenue bridge.



Workers finish the top of a bridge support Friday.



Workers shape the median of the I-40 Crosstown Expressway project Friday in Oklahoma City.

I-40 Crosstown timeline

November 1962
The first work on the I-40 Crosstown Expressway is scheduled to begin.

Here are some of the milestones in the history of the I-40 Crosstown Expressway:

January 1966
The elevated highway opens Jan. 8, 1966, at a cost of \$12.6 million. The roadway's official name is the Stanley Draper Expressway. The 1.77-mile stretch of elevated highway between Byers and Western was the state's first skyway.



January 1967
The initial portion of the expressway celebrates the first anniversary of its opening.

November 1974
State highway officials battle a serious corrosion problem due to the use of salt to thaw ice on the highway.



April 1978
The re-opening of lanes on the highway is pushed back after a two-year repair project is delayed.

October 1987
Westbound I-40 traffic is turned onto a newly constructed highway section, with new lanes starting just east of the Dallas junction and extending west to the beginning of the Crosstown.

November 1989
A cracked support beam on a portion of the Crosstown closes a large section of eastbound I-40.

