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The Times-Picayune

Florida bridge construction to start next year Final design now under way; road, span to be done in 2009

Friday, February 18, 2005

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St. Bernard/Paquemine bureaus

Construction on the \$180 million Florida Avenue bridge and roadway is expected to begin in spring 2006 and be finished by the end of 2009, state transportation officials said Wednesday.

Officials from the state Department of Transportation and Development provided an update at a public meeting Wednesday attended by about 50 local elected officials and residents. DOTD officials said the final design is under way on the new fixed-span high-level bridge to be built over the Industrial Canal, and federal approval from the Coast Guard is expected in July.

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The high-rise bridge and connecting roadway will be built next to the new low-level bridge at Florida Avenue, which opened in May. Officials say the high-rise bridge is needed to provide commuters a reliable crossing over the Industrial Canal because other crossings are often closed to cars and trucks to allow marine vessels to pass.

The first construction contract, for the high-rise bridge span and supports, should be awarded in the first quarter of next year, said Dale McDaniel, deputy director for major bridge projects with Louisiana TIMED Managers, the consulting firm managing all of the projects in the TIMED program.

TIMED stands for Transportation Infrastructure Model for Economic Development, a 1990 constitutionally adopted program that named 16 transportation projects to be financed with a fuel

tax of 4 cents per gallon. All projects are under way because the state is bonding the sales tax so it can start construction quickly.

Wednesday night's presentation included a computer-generated video fly-around of the project that let the audience see how the completed bridge will look from all angles.

McDaniel said the state will award two contracts simultaneously in the first quarter of 2007 for the other portions of the bridge -- the road from Tupelo Street in New Orleans to Paris Road in Chalmette and the sections of road between Tupelo and Alvar Street in New Orleans.

The 5-mile route designed to address traffic and evacuation problems is the same as the one discussed by residents and local officials at seven sets of community meetings held about a year ago.

McDaniel said the only difference is a slight shift in the road so it falls a little further south of Crescent Acres landfill near the Orleans-St. Bernard border to avoid the landfill and a high-pressure gas line.

The road's four-lane route will start with on-ramps and off-ramps at Alvar and Poland Avenue on its west side.

The bridge will hit ground level near Caffin Avenue with traffic signals planned at Caffin and at Tupelo. It will continue as two, 12-foot lanes with a 10-foot shoulder and a 4-foot striped median with traffic bumps in its center. As it enters St. Bernard, the road will rise through the marshland until it ends at Paris Road.

The project includes a left-turn lane on Alvar to allow vehicles to turn east onto Old Gentilly Road and to access Interstate 10 or Interstate 610 at Louisa Street.

TIMED is the single largest transportation program in state history, state officials said. Projects in the \$4 billion program include adding lanes to 557 miles of state highways, road widening, bridge construction and improvements to the Port of New Orleans and Louis Armstrong International Airport.

Information on the program can be found at www.timedia.com. For more information, contact the program at (866) 846-3352.

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