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Huey P. Long Bridge First Span Lift: An Engineering Success Story

JEFFERSON, La. –The “Big Lift” that began Saturday, June 19 on the Huey P. Long Bridge was successfully completed by Monday. The massive bridge segment was the first of three to be lifted in place using barges and strand jacks. The successful vertical lift of the massive steel structure larger than a football field lasted more than 12 hours. Once the structure was set on the supports points, it was skidded into place before it was properly secured. Even with such an intricate operation, roadway traffic was open nine hours ahead of schedule. The four-span bridge serves as one of the three major Mississippi River crossings in the New Orleans metro area.

“Saturday’s Big Lift was special on many levels,” said Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development Interim Secretary Sherri LeBas, P.E., who spent Saturday at the project site. “It is not everyday people witness something of this magnitude. Obviously, as an engineer I can appreciate the incredible technical achievement, but what was so inspiring was to hear firsthand the enthusiasm from many of the bystanders and residents that came out to share this momentous occasion with us.”

On Saturday, the steel structure began to be lifted at 7:30 a.m. using four 900-ton strand jacks. This structure was the heaviest one of the three scheduled to be lifted, weighing 5.5 million pounds with its stability frames and measuring 528 feet long. By midnight, the structure was set on the bearings or support points and was pinned three hours later. Shortly after 4 a.m., 14 secondary support beams



and two permanent beams were installed to help secure the structure before roadway traffic was opened nine hours earlier than planned. [View time-lapse video](#)

On Monday, the stability frames used to stabilize the structure during the lift were lowered to the barges using smaller strand jacks. When completed, the widened truss will allow the narrow bridge to have three 11-foot lanes, along with new inside and outside shoulders in each direction.

“Teamwork was the key to executing this unique operation so successfully and safely,” said Steve Underwood, project manager for MTI – a joint venture of Massman Construction Co., Traylor Brothers, Inc. and IHI, Inc. HNTB, a consulting engineering firm from Missouri, envisioned the lifting method used in order to save time and lessen the impact on road, rail and river traffic. This innovative method eliminated the use of falsework – support structure – in the Mississippi River which could run the risk of ship impact.

Due to the size and weight of the span segments, these lifts are very rare, especially in bridge work. The second span lift is schedule to occur later this year after hurricane season ends.

By the end of the project an estimated 17,500 tons of structural steel and 750,000 new bolts will be used during this truss phase of the project. The entire Huey P. Long Bridge Widening project cost is estimated at \$1.2 billion. Construction on the original 75-year old structure began in 1932 and was completed in December 1935 at a cost of \$13 million. Today, it is considered one of the longest railroad bridges in the United States.

DOTD encourages the public to follow up-to-date information about the upcoming Big Lift on the Huey P. Long Twitter page at www.twitter.com/hueypbridge and on Facebook at <http://bit.ly/HPLFB>.



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The Huey P. Long Bridge Widening Project is a TIMED (Transportation Infrastructure Model for Economic Development) Program project. The TIMED Program was created by Act 16 of the 1989 Louisiana Legislature, was voted for by the people and is the single largest transportation program in state history. The \$5.2 billion improvement program includes widening 536 miles of state highways, new construction or improvements to three major bridges projects and the improvements to both the Port of New Orleans and the Louis Armstrong International Airport. The Program is designed to enhance economic development in Louisiana through an investment in transportation projects.

As one of 16 TIMED projects, the completed Huey P. Long Bridge Widening Project will include three 11-foot lanes in each direction, along with new inside and outside shoulders across the bridge. The project also will include construction of new roadway approaches that will provide signalized intersections at Bridge City Avenue and Jefferson Highway. The entire project is scheduled to be complete by 2013.

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