

BRIDGING THE GAP

New span would relieve burden on the J.E. McTeer Bridge



BOB SOFALY • The Beaufort Gazette

Local officials and representatives from the Dennis Corp., Sanders Brothers Construction and United Contractors turn the soil Thursday to officially break ground on the new bridge expansion project on Lady's Island.

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Beaufort County and municipal officials put shovels to dirt Thursday to mark the start of construction on a \$34.6 million span across the Beaufort River on S.C. 802, parallel to the J.E. McTeer Bridge.

Construction began in August on the three-section project that also includes widening from two to four lanes the following stretches:

- Lady's Island Drive between Sea Island Parkway and Ribaut Road
- Savannah Highway between Parris Island Gateway and Robert Smalls Parkway

way

The widening projects will cost \$10.9 million.

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BRIDGES BY THE NUMBERS

16,000-18,000

Number of vehicles a day the J.E. McTeer Bridge was designed to accommodate

22,000

Number of vehicles a day that travel across the bridge

35,000

Number of vehicles a day that both the J.E. McTeer Bridge and the parallel bridge, after its construction is finished, will accommodate

BRIDGING

Continued from 1A

"It's a significant step forward in bringing our county up to speed," County Council chairman Weston Newton said of the work financed by a 1 percent road improvement sales tax passed in a 2006 countywide referendum.

Though the project is a step forward, local officials learned this week from the county engineer and finance director that some road plans could take a step back. They might have to be canceled, delayed or adjusted because of

REVIEW THE REPORTS

To review monthly progress reports on Beaufort County's 1 percent road improvement sales tax projects, go to the county's Web site at www.bcgov.net.

a lack of money.

FUNDING SHORTFALL

About \$300 million is slated for road projects across the county, with \$150 million coming from the 1 percent sales tax fund and about \$50 million

from impact fees, Newton said. But impact fees have dropped, mostly because of the recession that has slowed countywide development.

"Impact fee (money) is nonexistent right now," Newton said.

Officials also face higher-than-estimated construction costs for many projects, such as the planned expansion of Bluffton Parkway from U.S. 278 near the Hilton Head Island bridges to S.C. 170.

The county Transportation Advisory Group, which includes Newton, elected officials and residents from each municipality, met Monday to begin discussing how to handle the fund-

ing shortfalls.

The committee probably will meet again in mid-November, when county staff will recommend which road projects should move forward and which should be shelved. Details of revenue shortfalls and higher costs will be available at that time.

"One possibility is to just stagger some of those projects," Newton said. "We'll also keep looking for other funding sources."

RESIDENTS RAISE CONCERNS

Several of the county's partners were on hand Thursday to celebrate the start of construction of the bridge

across the Beaufort River.

Port Royal Mayor Sam Murray said he has heard concerns from residents about the impact construction will have on their neighborhoods.

Residents of Port Royal Landing, for example, question whether the noise barrier will be adequate enough to shield their community from the road work, which is expected to take two years, Murray said.

Representatives from bridge builder United Contractors of Chester and road builder Sanders Brothers Construction of North Charleston have agreed to meet with residents to answer questions, he said.