

THE OKLAHOMAN

NEWS

Bridge to link Tuttle, Mustang South Canadian River project to help boost development in area

Ellie Sutter

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TUTTLE - For more than 30 years, residents in eastern Canadian County and northern Grady County have talked and dreamed of a bridge over the South Canadian River to quickly link Tuttle with Mustang - and with the rest of the Oklahoma City metro area.

At 2 p.m. Tuesday, that dream will be realized when a new bridge spanning the river will officially open.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony is planned then on the bridge's southbound lane. Bands from Tuttle and Mustang high schools will begin playing at 1:45 p.m. as people arrive for the ceremony. Rep. Tim Pope, R-Mustang, will act as master of ceremonies.

Pope said he is excited to see the bridge come to fruition. He likened it to someone being in labor for childbirth for 12 years.

"I've been waiting to light the cigar," he said.

Pope said a lot of people have worked on this and had a part in making it happen.

"I have baby-sat it daily."

He expects the bridge across the river to open up the area to massive residential and commercial development.

"Land is still relatively cheap in Tuttle, and people are wanting the country life," the representative said.

Pope said there was little development in northwest Oklahoma City until the Kilpatrick Turnpike went in. Since that time, the housing and commercial development has been

phenomenal.

At the ceremony, Pope will introduce Lt. Gov. Mary Fallin, and Gary Ridley, director of the state Transportation Department, will speak. So will Mustang Mayor Ross Duckett and Tuttle's Acting city manager, Cheryl LaFerney.

Also listed on the ceremony's agenda are state Sen. Mike Johnson, R-Kingfisher; Rep. Susan Winchester, R-Chickasha; and Rep. Ray Young, R-Yukon, as well as Oklahoma County District No. 2 Commissioner Jack Cornett.

The stretch of highway between the two cities has been designated as a portion of State Highway 4.

Until now, the only access across the river in this area was via the bridge on U.S. 62, which was built in 1923 and replaced in 1963 when Interstate 44 was built following the U.S. 62 alignment.

U.S. 81 has a bridge built in 1955 that also crosses the river. It is farther west and connects El Reno and Chickasha.

State Transportation Department officials said the Tuttle-Mustang bridge is the first time the state has provided new access across the South Canadian River in this area since Interstate 35 was built. I-35 crosses the South Canadian River at Norman and was built in the mid-1960s.

Construction on the Tuttle/Mustang project started in February 2000. It was necessary to build seven miles of road to connect State Highway 37 south of the river to State Highway 152 north of the river.

This part of the project cost \$23.9 million.

Construction of the divided Canadian River Bridge and approaches began July 11, 2000, and it was completed Dec. 14, 2001, at a cost of \$11.6 million.

This stretch of road and the bridge connecting the two cities will cut several miles off the trip between the two cities.

Contractors who worked on this section of SH 4 include: Sewell Brothers, Cordell; D.M. Dozer Inc., Bradley; Haskell-Lemon Construction, Oklahoma City; Muskogee Bridge Co., Muskogee; and Western Plains Construction, Lincoln, Neb.

As welcome as this seven miles of road is, the next phase of SH 4 will benefit even more motorists.

SH 4 is scheduled to be extended south about five miles to connect with I-44. Work on this section of SH 4 will start next month and should be completed in October.

The cost of this stretch of highway is estimated at \$29.6 million.

This portion of SH 4 will connect with the turnpike spur, which feeds into State Highway 9 West just south of Norman and give west area residents easier access to Norman and the University of Oklahoma.

When this portion of the road is completed it will be possible to drive about three-quarters of the way around the metropolitan area on either four-lane highways or toll roads.

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