



freeway Today

Let's get together

June 2008

Connect the dots. First TxDOT finished Phase 1 and Phase 3a, then skipped about a mile and started on Phase 2. Now it's time to connect the DOT projects. Phase 3b of the Marsha Sharp Freeway project kicked off earlier this year, and contractors are well on their way to finishing the small portion from Salem Avenue to Chicago that will bring a major part of the freeway together. In fact, the entire project is about 18 percent complete, according to Will Barnett, Lubbock District assistant area engineer.

This \$37 million project includes building the freeway main lanes from Salem Avenue to Chicago and constructing the interchange at Slide Road and 34th Street.

Contractors are busy building sound walls and placing drill shafts for the 34th Street and Slide Road interchange. Other work includes installing drainage systems and moving lots of dirt.

In fact, the dirt work is probably as impressive as any of the structure work. To date, workers have moved and embanked about 3.7 million cubic yards of dirt on the freeway project. About 194,000 cubic yards have been placed on the 3b project with the bulk of the dirt stockpiled from the Phase 2 project.

Completion is scheduled for the fall of 2009. Phase 4 and 5 are delayed because of lack of funding. Phase 4 is a \$60 million project and includes the construction of the I27 interchange. Phase 5 is a \$50 million project and includes extending the freeway from one mile past the West Loop to past Wolfforth. Contractors are finishing up bridge columns at Red Raider Avenue. The pedestrian bridge at this location will open this summer. The pedestrian bridge west of the Coliseum will be open next month.

Dirt excavated	
Cubic Yards	
Phase 1	281,716 cy final
Phase 2	1,421,650 cy to date
Phase 3a	22,434 cy final
Phase 3b	6,814 cy to date
Total	1,732,614 cy
Dirt embanked	
Cubic Yards	
Phase 1	444,611 cy final
Phase 2	1,127,619 cy to date
Phase 3a	286,629 cy final
Phase 3b	77,682 cy to date
Total	1,936,541 cy

Contractors are mostly moving dirt on Phase 3B. This portion of the freeway project includes construction of the main lanes from Salem Avenue to Chicago and building the 34th St. and Slide Road interchange.



Lack of funds delay Phase 4

The message has been consistent since late last year. TxDOT is out of money, particularly for mobility projects.

Statewide, projects are being delayed or cancelled, and the new emphasis is on maintenance instead of construction.

In Lubbock, the statewide fiscal woes mean delays in local projects such as Phase 4 of the Marsha Sharp Freeway project.

“Funding is so uncertain we can’t even estimate when this project might go to bid,” said Jerry Cash, advanced project planning manager.

Phase 4 was funded until last year when TxDOT’s cash flow problems surfaced. The \$44 million set aside in Metro Mobility Category 4 went away with the discovery that the agency had double added \$1.1 billion in revenue.

Others factors contributed to the lack of funding also, said Steve Warren, district planning and development director.

Higher material costs and fuel prices and more fuel-efficient automobiles have also put a dent in TxDOT’s ability to fund projects, he added.

But we do have options, said Warren, who added that our strong Lubbock representation in the legislature will help us when it comes time to divvy out the money from a recent bond authority.

Proposition 12—passed by Texas voters in 2005—gives TxDOT the authority to issue up to \$5 billion in bonds.

“Hopefully, we will see some of this money,” Warren added. “But a lot depends on how they decide to distribute it. We don’t know what kind of conditions that they will put on this money. It could be they will decide to send it all to the large metropolitan areas. You just never know, but you can always hope.”

However, the legislature has to enable that bond authority in the next legislative session. So, although the money is there, TxDOT doesn’t have the authority yet to use it.

The only thing the district can do is wait, said Warren.

In the meantime, Lubbock engineers are busy preparing the project so it will be ready to go if and when money becomes available.

“We are finalizing plans and we will start clearing utilities this fall,” he noted. “All the right of way has been purchased so if they do give us money, we’ve got our project ready to roll.”

Other partners, however, have come to the table to help fund local projects. The city of Lubbock contributed \$12.5 million for Phase 3B of the Marsha Sharp Freeway project and \$25 million for the Northwest Passage project.

“TxDOT is contributing \$15 million toward the Northwest Passage,” added Warren. “We felt it would be more beneficial to put the money that was originally designated for Phase 4 into a project that would provide more immediate benefits for the city. It didn’t make sense to hold that money for several years when we could use it to complete a much-needed project sooner.”

The first phase of the Northwest Passage project—the Slide Road and North Loop 289 interchange—will begin in 2010. Plans are being developed for this \$40 million project that includes building an interchange and widening of Slide Road from 4th Street to the North Loop. TxDOT will design the interchange and the city will develop plans for the Fourth Street widening to North Loop 289. The city is funding the project with franchise fees

from utility bills. TxDOT will, however, develop the plans, let the project, and oversee the work.

There are still options for the Phase 4 of the freeway, explained Cash.

“Break it into phases or pay for it lump sum out of district discretionary money,” he added. “Problem is, that really depletes the district funds. Breaking it into phases might work best.”

Another option would be to borrow money from another district. Many times a district will have money but plans will not be ready to let before the lapse time to use the money.

“As we reorganize, the districts will begin to see “seamless borders,” he noted. “If one district has money and can’t mobilize, they could loan the money to another district—one who had plans ready to go.”

But no matter when the project lets, it’s certain that it will be built.

“This is just a minor setback,” he said. “Plans are ready and waiting for funding. We’re ready to go as soon as the money shows up.”

Granite employees place drainage pipe on Phase 2 of the freeway.



University Avenue and ped bridges to open soon

Several significant bridge openings will take place in the next few weeks on the Marsha Sharp Freeway project, including a pedestrian bridge across from Texas Tech that will give students faster access to the Tech campus on the south side of the project.

Pedestrian bridge #2 will open to foot traffic in early July, according to Will Barnett, Lubbock District assistant area engi-

neer and project manager.

“Decks have been poured, and the contractor will be forming and pouring rail—about 400 feet a week—for the next three weeks,” he added.

This pedestrian bridge is just east of Texas Tech Parkway, right across from the Ranching Heritage Center.

Pedestrian bridge #3—across from the stadium—will open mid to late August, Barnett said.

Contractors achieved a significant milestone with the University Avenue bridge construction. The east side of

the bridge will be open to traffic in mid-July.

The southbound deck is scheduled to be poured sometime in late August or early September.

Additional work includes excavating, connecting the existing storm sewer system, building retaining wall and hanging beams and pouring the bridge deck on the west side.



Contractors and TxDOT employees worked in the wee hours of the morning several weeks ago, pouring bridge deck for Pedestrian Bridge #2 just east of Texas Tech Parkway.

Photos by Emily Mason, TxDOT summer hire.



The east side of the University Avenue bridge will be open to traffic in mid-July.



19th Street milestone improves traffic flow

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) completed a portion of the Marsha Sharp Freeway last month that marked a major project milestone—the elimination of the 19th Street intersection.

Both eastbound and westbound freeway main lane traffic can now travel under the 19th Street bridges. This move eliminated the 19th Street and Brownfield Highway signal.

The department opened the following

ramps and lanes last month at the 19th Street intersection, including:

- the ramp from Texas Tech Parkway onto the eastbound freeway main lanes
- the westbound frontage road from Tech Parkway to 19th Street and the on-ramp to the freeway main lanes
- the Memphis Avenue extension north to tie in with Texas Tech Parkway, and
- the eastbound frontage road from Quaker through Memphis

In addition, TxDOT added a left-turn

lane from westbound 19th Street onto southbound Quaker Avenue and placed (both the eastbound and westbound) main lane traffic onto westbound lanes of the freeway. Changes also included placing westbound traffic on the new Quaker Avenue bridge.

Motorists are advised to pay close attention when driving through construction zones.

Meet the Summer Hires



Left, summer hire Jared Brown dumps concrete on Phase2 of the freeway. Center, summer hire Emily Mason completes paperwork for Phase 3B. At right, summer hire Byron Buxkemper makes concrete cylinders.

