Charleston Daily Mail
DAILYMAIL.COM

Big bridge stars on its own Web site

Five of the seven piers have been erected to support the new Interstate 64 bridge connecting Dunbar and South Charleston. Crews anticipate the bridge to be completed in late 2010.

Zack Pettit
April 9, 2008

Monitoring progress of the new interstate bridge connecting South Charleston and Dunbar now is a lot easier and safer than gazing at the gigantic concrete platforms during intense rush hour traffic.

Now, updates on the bridge construction are available at the click of a button.

In conjunction with EarthCam, a leading Web cam software and technology provider, the Division of Highways has brought the general public live, updated pictures of the worksites online.

Three cameras, one at each end of the future bridge and one attached somewhere near the middle of the existing bridge, were mounted last week. They give updated images of the bridge construction once every five to 15 minutes.

Each of those cameras is available through the highways department Web site for public access. They also were put in place for a variety of other reasons, said John Buchanan, project supervisor.

"They're certainly to allow the public to keep an update," Buchanan said. "They're also for safety, evidence, monitoring, security and education."

"There's really some good opportunities, say, if a classroom watched it from the beginning, they could learn from this," added Brent Walker, division of highways spokesman.

Not only will live video be captured, but still images also will be shot once per hour by each camera, ultimately providing an hour-by-hour assembly of the 2,975-foot bridge, Buchanan said.

As far as actual progress, Buchanan said crews are on pace to hit or come close to the projected deadline of October 2010, or by his rather specific estimation, about 19 percent finished.

He admitted at the beginning the pace wasn't much faster than a crawl, because of the intricate nature and lack of knowledge about the concrete structure. Since then, though, the pace has increased considerably.

The unorthodox style in which the bridge is being built - using form travelers to build 16 foot spans at a time by means of a cantilevering method - is something new to West Virginia, he said.

"We've never built a bridge like that before," said Buchanan, who has about 32 years in the construction business. "It's a pretty interesting project. There is a learning curve on everything we do; we could tell that between pier seven and pier one."

The bridge is being constructed out of concrete, instead of the more expensive and common steel.

The cost for concrete, about $83 million, rather than steel, is a difference of about $30 million, he said.

When the bridge is finally complete, it will be the longest continual segmental span in the country, Buchanan said. Its length will be a little less than 3,000 feet, while the main span will be about 760 feet.

The pre-stressed concrete, which is much stronger than regular concrete, will be further strengthened with rebar and steel tendons traversing inside, he said.

So when people are traveling over the four lane, eastbound highway and don't see any support along the middle, they should know that the reinforced, compressed concrete is just as strong as steel, he said.

And, of course, while the bridge is being built to alleviate the heavy flow of traffic on the existing, accident prone bridge, Walker said he hopes people don't pay too much attention to the workers or equipment.

"We want to remind motorists that it is a work zone, and while these awesome form travelers are sights to see, we would like to make sure they are careful when driving by," he said.

To access the Web cams, got to www.wvdot.com and click on Highway Projects, then select the proper link.