



## US 77 overpass opens early

By M. Scott Carter

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— Construction on the US 77 -- Flood Avenue -- overpass has reached a "major milestone" and the bridge would be opened late Tuesday night, officials with the Oklahoma Department of Transportation said Tuesday afternoon.

ODOT spokesperson Terri Angier said crews were "expected to remove barrier walls Tuesday night" which would allow motorists to use the bridge during morning rush hour today.

"It's opening about two weeks early, according to the contract," she said.

The northbound lanes under the bridge opened late Monday evening, she said.

Angier said motorists on southbound Interstate 35 also will see other improvements this week, when the Robinson Street on and off-ramps are reopened Friday morning.

She said construction on the bridge -- which carries southbound traffic onto U.S. 77 over northbound I-35 -- was scheduled to be completed by the end of July, in time for the fall school term.

"We tried to incorporate the dates of the OU's fall semester and the opening of the OU football season into the construction schedule," she said.

In addition to its early finish, Angier said the overpass incorporates aesthetic treatments which "add a distinctive Oklahoma flair" to the structure.

The bridge -- painted cream and trimmed with crimson-colored support beams -- features embossed designs of the state bird, the scissor-tailed flycatcher.

"This bridge is one of the first major products in the state we've done aesthetic treatments on," she said.

Angier said the design was chosen by Norman city officials and is unique to the area.

"This design is specifically for Norman," she said. "We worked with the city a lot on this."

In addition to the new overpass, Angier said the southbound on and off-ramps to Robinson Street were extended and resurfaced.

Other improvements include additional lanes, and safety features such as concrete median barriers and overhead lighting.

The project is part of a \$40 million effort to widen the interstate from Indian Hills Road to north of Main Street. The entire project is expected to be finished in the summer of 2010. And while various ramp closures are still expected, Angier said crews plan to keep two lanes in each direction open to traffic during the daytime during construction.

Currently, about 75,000 vehicles use that stretch of I-35 daily, making it one of the state's busiest four-lane stretches of highway.

At the time it was designed in the 1950s, the interstate was expected to carry 25,000 to 30,000 vehicles daily.

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