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Work Zone with One-Lane Traffic on U.S. 51 Ohio River 'Cairo' Bridge Extended to Oct. 25

Delay attributed to joint fabrication

PADUCAH, Ky. (Sept. 22, 2020)

— A contractor for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet (KYTC) is extending the completion date for work on the U.S. 51/U.S. 60/U.S. 62 Ohio River "Cairo" Bridge to Oct. 25, 2020.

Extending the duration of the work zone with one-lane traffic and an 8 foot, 6-inch load width restriction is required to complete bridge deck and joint replacement work.

The target completion date was Oct. 1. Extending the date to Oct. 25 is mainly due to a delay in fabrication of steel for new finger joints for the bridge deck.

Since work started in early-June, the work zone with one-lane traffic and alternating flow controlled by an automated signal has created delays of up to an hour during peak travel periods at the Ohio River crossing between Wickliffe, Kentucky, and Cairo, Illinois.

KYTC District 1 Chief Engineer Kyle Poat said extending the completion date means travel challenges will continue for daily commuters and cross-country travelers.

"This is not what any of us wanted to hear. However, this maintenance work is designed to get the 84-year-old structure in optimum condition as we move toward construction of a new bridge in the future," Poat said. "This also extends the work on into fall harvest season, creating an additional challenge for farmers who haul grain across the river."

Work on the bridge started in June with one-lane traffic. The bridge was closed to all traffic during much of August to allow substantial improvements to the roadway along the Kentucky approach embankment. During the roadway work, the contractor continued with placement of a concrete deck overlay and replacement of joints on the bridge structure.

The U.S. 51 Ohio River "Cairo" Bridge serves as a north-south connector for U.S. 51, as well as an east-west transportation corridor for U.S. 60 and U.S. 62. The bridge carries about 7,000 vehicles per day between Kentucky and Illinois. About 35 percent of that is commercial trucks. The truck traffic volume slows movement of traffic at the automated signal.

"We know extending this work zone by almost a month will create an ongoing inconvenience for commuters and travelers. Our contractor is pressing ahead with the remaining work. Our best estimate is that October 25th is a realistic revised target completion date. We will provide the public with a progress update should that date change," Poat said.

The U.S. 51 Ohio River Bridge connects Kentucky and Illinois about 5 miles north of Wickliffe at Kentucky mile point 7.372. Also known as the Cairo Bridge, it connects with the U.S. 60/U.S. 62 Mississippi River Bridge that carries traffic between Illinois and Missouri.

Intech Contracting, LLC, is the prime contractor on an \$8,060,092 project aimed at optimizing the existing bridge structure and the Kentucky approach in anticipation construction on a new bridge could start in the next 10 to 15 years.

The U.S. 51 Ohio River "Cairo" Bridge opened to traffic on Nov. 11, 1936. The Cairo-Wickliffe Bridge is at Ohio River navigation mile point 980.4 near the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

