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I-10 Bridge Update
It's Actually Happening



EPIC IMAGE

I-10 Bridge Update It's Actually Happening

----- BY DIANA VALLETTE -----

Even the toughest non-believer has probably (at least once) muttered a prayer under their breath when driving across the I-10 bridge.

The current I-10 bridge is more than 70 years old. It predates the interstate and, unlike most modern bridges, is narrow, steep, has little shoulder and lacks lighting. You are unlikely to find anyone who doesn't agree it needs to go.

The DOTD announced recently the mega-project, which is likely to take a total of seven years and cost \$2.3 billion, is officially a go. Calcasieu Bridge Partners (CBP), the contractor company in charge of the project, is cleared to begin work, but don't expect to see anything happening until spring 2026.

CBP's CEO and project manager Robert Morphonios says, "The stage we're at right now is design, permitting and acquisitions." The company will need to retain right-of-way from some busi-



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The new bridge will not be as steep and will have six total lanes, full shoulders and roadway lighting.

ness and until all of that is handled, actual hammering won't begin.

Morphonios and his wife recently moved to Lake Charles from Kentucky.

"We love it here. The very first day when we were moving into our home – even before our moving truck pulled up – we had neighbors asking how they could help. That's never happened anywhere else."

Morphonios says he's met with all three area mayors who will be impacted by this project (Lake Charles mayor Nic Hunter, Westlake mayor Hal McMillin and Sulphur mayor Mike Danahay) and he's been impressed with their hospitality. "They all told us to let them know if there's anything they can do to help. This is going to be a very collaborative process. We're going to work together."

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continued



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Once the new bridge is open to traffic, demolition on the old bridge will begin.

Residents can expect public engagement meetings in the future where they'll be able to ask questions.



This project is a public-private partnership, which will include investment from state and federal governments as well as grants. CBP is also investing in the project. "That's the only way you get these big megaprojects funded," says Morphonios. "No one likes a toll, but you can't do this without it. A gas tax just doesn't support big projects like this."

The toll will be an electronic one which features computer controlled cameras and requires no stopping. Actual figures are in flux, but it is estimated that the state will retain 15 percent of the toll.

The tolls will not be charged until the new bridge is open to traffic; discounted rates will be available for residents of the five parish area. Once the new bridge is open to traffic, demolition on the old bridge will begin.

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State Sen. Mark Abraham says, “I think our job as the legislature is to protect the people and if you have a bridge that could be faulty or is nearing its end of life, you want to make sure you do everything to make sure that nothing happens to that bridge.”

CBP will design, build, operate and maintain this project for 50 years. “I don’t think I’ll be here,” Morphonios says, laughing.

Although he says he has been won over by our area’s cuisine, especially “crayfish” etouffee. “I’m really looking forward to my first crawfish boil.”

Morphonios recently completed a joint project between Kentucky and Indiana. The two states worked together to build a cable stay bridge across the Ohio River as well as two tunnels going underneath the highway. They bid the project at four years and it took just under four despite unexpected setbacks with flooding.

Morphonios says he’s been part of some projects that never got off the ground because the environmental impacts were too great or because they were contested projects. He says that won’t be the case here. “Everyone agrees it needs to be done. The main thing seems to be that people are just surprised it’s actually happening.”

The design renderings of the bridge are not ready to be shared at this point because design is still in flux, but residents



can expect a large, concrete bridge. “It’s going to need to be even longer than initially planned in order to go over railroads that were in conflict. We’re going to make it as attractive as possible.”

He says he and his team are discussing incorporating local elements whether that’s the cities or using the famous pistols as part of the design.

“We want to make sure we’re not impacting fish or manatees and that wildlife can move freely and not be impacted in their environments. That’s incredibly important to us.”

The biggest challenge, he says, will be manpower. “We want to use as many local contractors as our workforce as possible.” CBP plans to collaborate with McNeese State University and other state universities to find qualified engineers to help with the project. “About 1,500 total people will touch this project.”

The design/build leg of the company employs people from all over the world including Australia, Norway, Spain and other countries.

Residents can expect public engagement meetings in the future where they’ll be able to ask questions. For more information, visit i10calcasieubridge.com.