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TODAY'S NEWS

South Fork Bridge traffic to shift in matter of weeks; VDOT targets February for opening day

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The Warren Sentinel

FRONT ROYAL — The South Fork Bridge replacement project has reached the halfway point and motorists heading north out of Front Royal soon will switch over to the new bridge.

The Virginia Department of Transportation plans to shift traffic to the new bridge in a matter of weeks, VDOT spokesman Ken Slack said.

"They're looking at probably the middle of February, where they're going to be moving northbound traffic onto the new bridge," he said, adding that work still needs to be done on sidewalks, parapets and railings.

Southbound traffic heading into town on Shenandoah Avenue will remain on the current bridge temporarily, Slack said.

"What's going to happen right after that is there's going to be a lot of work done on the approaches," he said.

The approaches for northbound traffic on Shenandoah Avenue, including longer turning lanes and a new turning lane for southbound traffic at 18th Street, will be ready by the time of the switch. However, the southbound approaches on Winchester Road will need to be finished, Slack said.

The \$48.4 million project includes a realigned intersection between Winchester and Strasburg road, which plays into the southbound approaches.

"That probably will take a couple of months," he said. "They're looking at probably by say mid to late April being able to get all the traffic onto the new bridge," Slack said.

The target dates, of course, are dependent on the weather, he said.

The new bridge replaces a structure that was built in 1941 with an expected 50-year lifespan. That milestone came and went nearly a quarter century ago.

Don't expect the old bridge to go out in a grand spectacle. It will be more like a basic disassembly.

"There's not going to be a big boom or anything of that nature," Slack said. "They will be demolishing it but it's going to be more of a gradual process."

After all the traffic is onto the new bridge and the old one is cleared, contractor G.A. & F.C. Wagman of York, Pa., will build two additional lanes to complete the new bridge.

"They're going to have multiple lanes going each way, plus turn lanes [for Strasburg Road and East 18th Street] on the bridge," Slack said.

The two final lanes will be built on a new set of piers, but still be attached to the new bridge, he said.

"We just finished something similar to that down in the Fishersville area with the bridge going over I-64," he said. "You're shifting traffic around while you're building new stuff and you tie it all in together at the end."