



End of bridge project in sight

By **Katie Farrell**

Staff writer

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NEWBURY — The Route 1A bridge will likely open next week, state Rep. Harriet Stanley told constituents in an e-mail sent out yesterday.

The bridge, which crosses over the Parker River, closed to road traffic on Sept. 27, 2007, for what was expected to be a two-year construction project.

It will now open nine months early. Much of the expedited time frame is due to the work of contractor, S&R Corp. of Lowell, whose crew has been working 10-hour days and eight hours on Saturday to move the project along.

The bridge was slated to open this week, but the series of weekend snowstorms pushed that time frame back to the week of Jan. 4 to 10, Stanley noted in her message.

"As soon as MassHighway gives us an exact date, we will pass it on," Stanley wrote yesterday.

By the looks of it, the bridge seems ready to go. The guardrails are in place, and the lines have been painted on the road.

Neighbors of the bridge are eagerly awaiting the moment the bridge is ready.

"It looks to me like it's all done," Bunny Fernald, owner of Fernald Marine said yesterday. "I don't know what the holdup is."

Marsh Avenue resident Kathy Muse, who lives south of the bridge, said the neighborhood is excited to learn the actual date the bridge will open. Her husband spent much of the time during the closing commuting by boat when possible, she said.

"It was such a horrible shock and inconvenience to so many people," Muse said. "We're very happy it's opening early."

Grateful neighbors threw a "thank-you party" for the workers on the bridge project last week, Muse said. The contractors have been at the site on Saturdays and in bad weather, which helped expedite the work, she said.

Her eighth-grade class at Triton helped make a "thank-you" sign to give the bridge workers while they were served a luncheon by neighbors.

"We just wanted to thank them; we're so excited to have the bridge back," Muse said, adding that about 8 to 10 neighbors pitched in time and effort for the lunch.

MassHighway planned to replace the circa-1930 bridge for several years. District Highway Director Patricia Leavenworth told a gathering of local residents in July 2007 the work had originally been scheduled in stages so that at least one lane of traffic would be open throughout the construction. Under that plan, it would have been completed in September 2010.

But state officials changed their minds and closed the bridge when they discovered deterioration was worse than originally thought. After it closed, MassHighway detoured traffic to Route 1, using Route 133 west in Rowley and Hanover Street in Newbury as the connectors between Routes 1A and 1.

Brian Fernald, a grandson of Bunny Fernald, said the family's shop saw a drop in traffic during the closure. Others would drive down Route 1 unaware the bridge wasn't open and would ask how to get around to the other side, he said.

"It seemed like a lot of people were unaware that it was closed," Brian Fernald said.

Adam Hurtubise, a spokesman for MassHighway, said yesterday the bridge will open "very early in 2009."

"While our goal was to open to traffic by the end of the year, much of our construction season is weather dependent, and the recent bad weather cost us approximately a week of construction time," Hurtubise wrote in an e-mail.

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Photos



Bryan Eaton/Staff photo A bulldozer heads over the roadway of the Route 1A bridge in Newbury over the Parker River in a view looking north. A construction crew works on the sidewalk section, as the bridge is just about ready to reopen. Staff Photographer