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Controversial crossing

Work resumes near Prospect on Harrods Creek Bridge

New timetable set for renovating the 100-year old span

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PROSPECT, Ky. (December 2009) – To the frustration of Prospect, Ky., area commuters and business owners, the Harrods Creek Bridge has been closed for close to a year. Work has recently resumed on a project that was expected to be completed by now but was stalled due to controversy over safety and repair issues.

“Work is under way again,” said Lindsay English, Communications Coordinator for Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson.

The timetable for the project is open she said, “because we’re going into the coldest and most unpredictable parts of the season.” Just when the project will be completed depends on the weather. A local nonprofit preservation group, River Fields Inc., has dropped two lawsuits making it easier for the project to move forward. The group had filed an injunction which halted work, but this was lifted on Sept. 25, said English. By the end of the month, work had begun again on the bridge. At the time the bridge was closed on Nov. 26, 2008, River Fields members thought minor repairs could have been made to keep the bridge open, thus avoiding unnecessary inconveniences. The closing came as a result of Louisville Metro city engineers and the Kentucky Department of Transportation’s estimation that the bridge’s guard rails weren’t sturdy enough to deflect vehicles. The bridge was closed due to the recommendation of state inspector Matt Bullock.

Work to widen and shore up the structure began in June 2009 but was stopped twice by U.S. District Judge Charles Simpson when River Fields asked for a temporary halt. The first



File photo by Don Ward

**Metro Louisville recently
resumed work on the one-lane
Harrods Creek Bridge.**

lawsuit was filed by River Fields and four co-plaintiffs: the River Creek Homeowners Association, OPEN Louisville, the Wolf Pen Preservation Association and the Harrods Creek boat Owners Association.

The lawsuit claimed that “the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, Louisville Metro and the Federal Highway Administration violated federal law by failing to ‘meaningfully evaluate an enhanced one-lane bridge alternative’,” said Lee Cory, who sits on the River Fields Board of Trustees. The lawsuit urged the court “to send the matter back to these agencies to consider a ‘feasible and prudent’ alternative.”

River Fields had also filed a related lawsuit against the U.S. Coast Guard, which issued a permit for the widening of the bridge. This lawsuit argued that the Coast Guard failed to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act prior to approving the permit application.

The project will move forward more readily if all of the contractors and sub-contractors who were hired before will return to work. Many moved on to other jobs once construction came to a standstill. MAC Construction is the contractor for the project.

The project is expected to cost just more than \$3 million, said English. This amount includes \$1 million for a special design to preserve the bridge’s historic character.

River Fields believes that if alternatives had been considered in the first place, such as the city simply repaving the bridge and repairing the guard rails, the bridge would have been open in less than six weeks. Cory said it was closed long before Metro Louisville had the appropriate permits and approvals to begin construction.

For many, there are safety issues involved with the one-lane bridge. “Safety is and has always been our major concern,” said Cory. As part of Metro Louisville’s only designated Scenic Byway, Cory believes the bridge should provide a safe driving and cycling experience. “The one-lane design has a speed-dampening effect on what is already a very curvy road from both approaches. We are very concerned that a two-lane bridge will cause drivers to increase their speed and cause more accidents,” Cory said.

She does feel that River Fields has accomplished two important goals with this project. Due to River Fields’ early work during the historic preservation process, the final design will preserve the beautiful historic arches of the bridge. They also protected surrounding historic resources that are essential to the character of Harrods Creek.

The group will continue to take an interest in the bridge in the future. “We’ll continue to monitor the project to make certain that historic properties and the natural environment are protected, in compliance with a Memo of Agreement under historic preservation law,” said Cory.