



NEWS

Harahan boardwalk now extends nearly halfway across the Mississippi



October 22, 2015 - Construction workers leave for the day from working on the Harahan Bridge Boardwalk. The boardwalk has been extended across almost half of the Mississippi river. (Nikki Boertman/The Commercial Appeal)

By Tom Charlier of The Commercial Appeal

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Harry Pratt stepped onto a newly poured slab of concrete at one end of the Harahan Bridge Thursday and looked toward the east — and the future.

"This is our trailhead on the west," said Pratt, technical project manager for the [\\$17 million bicycle-pedestrian boardwalk](#) that's being built on the 99-year-old railroad span over the Mississippi River.

Pratt's vision isn't difficult to grasp these days. In recent weeks, crews for construction contractor OCCI Inc. have been assembling 120- to 180-foot sections of the aluminum-and-steel boardwalk on the Tennessee side of the river and then methodically pulling them with a cable toward the Arkansas bank.

By Thursday, about 900 feet of the boardwalk had been set in place along a cantilevered steel frame — situated outside the main rail span — that carried motor vehicles before the Memphis & Arkansas Bridge was completed in 1949. That means the boardwalk now extends across nearly half the 2,000-foot width of the river at the bridge.

Including the broad floodplain on the Arkansas side, the boardwalk will extend some 5,000 feet when it opens to cyclists and pedestrians around the fall of 2016.

The boardwalk is the centerpiece of the \$40 million [Main to Main Intermodal Connector Project](#) linking the downtowns of Memphis and West Memphis. Covering 10 miles, from Main in Memphis to Broadway in West Memphis, the project includes street and drainage improvements, many of which already have been completed on South Main.

Funding for the work comes from a variety of sources, with the largest chunk comprising a nearly \$15 million federal Transportation Improvement Generating Economic Recovery grant. The Tennessee Department of Transportation provided two grants totaling more than \$3.6 million. Private sources, including charitable foundations, corporations and individuals, are chipping in more than \$5 million — or twice the \$2.5 million in capital costs borne by the city of Memphis.

During a tour and construction update Thursday afternoon, Pratt and other officials described the challenges of the piecemeal construction process that takes place atop an aging bridge that's still used by the Union Pacific Railroad.

"We had to make some repairs ... and clean out rust," said Pratt, vice president of the firm Allen & Hoshall.

Safety boats are deployed in the river when workers are on the bridge, he said.

At the western end, the boardwalk will connect to a spiral concrete ramp that will have viewing and rest areas, as well as space for entertainment events. The ramp, in turn, will link up with a series of trails, including a 73-mile route along the main-stem levee leading all the way to Marianna, Arkansas. Special gates are being installed along the levee to allow cyclists while still restraining cattle that graze in the area.

Terry Eastin, executive director of the Big River Strategic Initiative, which is helping guide the overall project, said the boardwalk and trail connections will have a major impact on the region.

"I think it'll do more to draw West Memphis and Downtown Memphis together than anything imaginable," she said.



About Tom Charlier

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