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New M-30 bridge will be benefit to community

By [Tony Lascari](#)

A new bridge over the Tittabawassee River in Sanford is going to save a lot of people a lot of time.

Among them is Gary Briggs, whose business takes him north and south on Meridian Road (M-30) hauling products. He said the opportunity to have a straight route through, instead of going through three extra miles through Sanford, is great news.

"It is going to be a blessing to see that thing go in there," he said. "I mean, it's countless miles and gas."

Kurt Cormier, a Jerome Township board member, said the community as a whole will benefit from the project.

"We're excited about the prospects of economic development," he said.

The \$6.4 million Midland County Road Commission project had an official kickoff Wednesday, though Allegan-based contractor Milbocker & Sons previously had started clearing the path for the bridge.

About 60 people gathered amid construction equipment and mounds of soil at the north end of the construction zone, with a view across the river they soon will be able to cross.

Gene Smith, chairman of the Midland County Road Commission, is looking forward to the project's completion.

"By this time next year we can hopefully be driving across that bridge," he said.

Jennifer Dougherty, with Grand Rapids-based Scott Civil Engineering, said the bridge's design will improve safety for drivers in the area.

Steel and concrete will be used, with the concrete getting a fieldstone-like finish. The Pere Marquette Rail-Trail will be located under the bridge, with concrete walls on both sides made to match the fieldstone look of the bridge.

Dougherty said while the river is about 250 feet wide, the bridge portion of the project will be 1,170 feet long.

"The length of the bridge was dictated by the floodplain," she said.

That means three of the bridge's nine spans will be over water, while the remaining six will be over the floodplain.

Funding for the project started with a federal grant that U.S. Rep Dave Camp, R-Midland, helped secure in 2005. Camp said he looks forward to driving on the bridge, and gave thanks to the workers who will spend all winter constructing it.

He said the project has economic benefits and will make travel easier.

"That's going to be very important for this area," Camp said. "It's something I've heard since I was a kid: How do we get another north-south connector?"

Larry Tibbits, MDOT chief operations officer, said a lot of funding sources were brought together to make the project happen, including a state Jobs Today match of more than \$1 million.

"These projects like this don't happen unless you come together and form partnerships," he said. "It's really a regional improvement. I think this project is going to make a difference in the safety of the motoring public around Midland."

Deepak Gupta, Midland County Road Commission manager, helped pull together 12 sources of funding for the project.

He said the current bridge in Sanford will continue to be used by local residents.

"It's going to have less traffic on it and be good for locals," he said.

The new bridge will be under construction for a year, with the estimated completion set for November 2008.