

BRIDGE OUT OF TROUBLED WATERS

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By Nicole Haley

Waltham, MA – Work on the long awaited Rte. 128-Winter Street Bridge has been progressing noticeably over the past several weeks since a new contractor picked up the \$19 million project.

"It's still a concern about the traffic but they are making much more progress than they have been," Mayor Jeannette A. McCarthy said yesterday.

The Mass Highway project began in early 2005 and city officials originally believed work would be completed before November 2007. After problems with the previous contractor and significant delays, that date continues to get pushed back.

"We expect them to keep continuing to work at a good pace throughout the rest of the year," said Erik Abell, a Mass Highway spokesman.

Abell said the project has picked up momentum since South Boston-based McCourt Construction came on board early this year. In the next few months, Abell said the contractor hopes to have a temporary four-lane bridge completed.

The new bridge will be both taller and wider, expanding to seven lanes, from four, and from increasing to 16 _ feet high, from 14. McCourt Construction, which took over after initial contractor Roads Corp. defaulted, has been working on new retaining walls for the temporary bridge.

"They're also starting work on the permanent bridge as well," Abell said.

However, he said the project "will certainly take us through the end of this year into 2008 and probably into 2009."

As executive director of the 128 Business Council - a nonprofit public/private partnership formed to help reduce traffic along the Rte. 128 corridor - Caroline Connor has been feeding commuters the most up-to-date information on the ongoing construction.

"People are really happy with the fact that there has been so much work that you can see," Connor said.

While relieved to see progress being made, Connor said, drivers are also frustrated by the traffic holdups from construction. She said an increased police presence has shown up at the site to stop people from running through red lights

when traveling eastbound on Winter Street at the intersection of Second Avenue.

"If they do run red lights now, people will get stopped and it will back up traffic," Connor says.

Connor said the temporary bridge will free up a lot of the "bottleneck" traffic. In the end, Connor said, the inconvenience will be worth it since Mass Highway is doing more than just repairing the old bridge. The new Winter Street Bridge will be both easier to travel and nicer to look at, she said.

"After all is said and done the improvements will be very significant. There will be new lighting, new sidewalks, it will be pedestrian friendly, and it will be all of the things it is not now," Connor said.

For McCarthy, the improvements are long overdue.

"I've said it before and I'll say it again - I'm going to say 'hallelujah' when it's finished," McCarthy said.