

Five massive steel beams will support a new railroad bridge in Clemson. PAUL BROWN

Beams in place, new work begins at Clemson rail bridge

Placement at State 133 and U.S. 123 should reduce disruptions to traffic, DOT engineer says

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CLEMSON—Massive 20-ton steel beams now are in place, a major milestone in construction of a new railroad bridge spanning State 133 at U.S. 123, the busiest intersection in the city of Clemson.

The five beams from Augusta Iron and Steel took hours longer to install than expected, stopping traffic in the college town late into the night, said Kent Guthrie, city engineer.

All the steel is now in place for the northern side of the railroad bridge, Guthrie said.

Preparations are being made to pour a concrete deck on the bridge, and then retaining walls will be constructed adjacent to the bridge, said Tommy Hendricks, resident construction engineer with state Department of Transportation.

With the steel beams in place, there should only be brief disruptions to traffic "for the foreseeable future," Hendricks said.

By next spring, the bridge should be ready for Norfolk Southern to put in the new tracks across the bridge, Hendricks said. Then trains can be routed across the new bridge and demolition of the the old railroad bridge will begin. A second track will be built in its place, so there will be two separate side-by-side railroad bridges over the roadway.

Road work also is starting on an additional right turn lane on College Avenue coming from the direction of the Clemson University campus into U.S. 123, Guthrie said. There will be only occasional, short traffic delays where the turn lane is going in, Guthrie said.

The long-awaited new rail bridge was initially planned for completion in April and has been extended through the end of next year. The total project is expected to be complete by February, 2013, Hendricks said.

The narrow opening where traffic funnels under the bridge has been a safety issue in the city for years. The new bridge will provide a wider passage for vehicles on the highway under the train tracks.

It's the city's only rail crossing and in addition to constricting traffic, it was prone to flooding. If closed by wrecks or flooding, emergency vehicles had to go to Central to cross the railroad tracks that separate a large residential area, two schools and a popular recreation area on Lake Hartwell from emergency services.

The $11 million project is funded by state Department of Transportation and federal economic stimulus money.