



Advocate staff photo by Bill Felt

Work on the east bank approach to the Gramercy-Wallace Bridge is ahead of schedule, but bids for the first phase of the west bank approaches won't be awarded until September.

# Work on 'Bridge to Nowhere' proceeding

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**GRAMERCY** — For years, the Gramercy-Wallace bridge looked like a victim of a "smart" bomb attack.

With no way on and no way off, the four-lane bridge — dubbed the "Bridge to Nowhere" — loomed over the Mississippi River like an existential nightmare.

While work on the east bank approach to the bridge now is proceeding ahead of schedule, it'll be mid-1992 at least before drivers can get down to the other side.

Construction on the bridge began 10 years ago during the administration of Gov. Dave Treen.

The oil bust and shaky state finances put the project on hold until Gov. Buddy Roemer decided to finish the project, which he has said never should have been built in the first place.

That view has not been shared by St. James Parish President Paul Keller or by Roemer's transportation secretary, Neil Wagoner, who was a proponent of the bridge when he served in the same post under Treen.

"That bridge will provide the factor that will lead to residential growth in the Lutchier-Gramercy and Vacherie areas," Keller said, adding that the bridge is "a complete necessity" to the proposed Formosa Chemicals and Fibre Corp. rayon pulp plant in Wallace in St. John the Baptist Parish.

The plans for the west bank approaches had to be redrawn because of the proposed Formosa plant, said DOTD District Engineer Tom Bergeron.

Construction of the east bank approach began in May 1990 and is ahead of schedule, said State Department of Transportation and Development Project Engineer Ronnie Robinson.

Original designs called for the east bank approach to tie into only U.S. 61 and the west bank approach to tie into only La. 3127. Those plans were revised so

drivers on the River roads — La. 44 on the east bank and La. 18 on the west bank — can have access to the bridge.

Robinson said original plans also called for closing La. 641 on the east bank during construction, but "we decided to try to work our way around that."

Keller said local officials were able to convince the state to bid the west bank approaches to La. 18 and La. 3127 as separate projects — or else the bridge would not be opened for another three years.

Bids for the west bank approach to La. 18 will be awarded in September, Bergeron said. Bids for the La. 3127 approach won't be awarded until 1993, he said.

"I know it's not a matter of money," Keller said of the delays. "(It's) just a matter of political priorities."

The bridge is the fourth span across the Mississippi between Baton Rouge and New Orleans and has been estimated to cost \$115 million.