

TANGIBLE PROGRESS



STAFF PHOTO BY MILES SMITH

Construction workers take a breather in front of the first of two footings that will support the new US 281 bridge in Marble Falls. Workers began installing the footing this week.

Bridge, road projects begin taking shape

BY MILES SMITH
HIGHLAND LAKES NEWSPAPERS

If you've driven over the US 281 bridge in Marble Falls this week, you've maybe noticed something tall and red sticking out of the water.

The odd looking structure on the southwest side of the existing bridge isn't a watch tower or some sort of offshore observation deck, says Timothy Weight, director of turnpike construction for the Texas Department of Transportation.

"That is the form work for one of the footings that will support the new bridge," Weight said.

The form is one of two concrete drill shafts on the southwest side of the existing bridge that will measure eight feet in diameter and extend 20 feet into the dolomite rock that makes up the bottom of Lake Marble Falls. The next step is to pour a massive concrete footing that captures both of the drill shafts and

Bridge ... see Page 8A

Bridge: Takes shape

From Page 1A

makes them act as one, Weight said.

"Picture a table top that's the footing, supported by legs," Weight explained. "But, in this case, it's two legs rather than four. It's pretty important that we get all this right, because that is what will support several million pounds of concrete in the future.

"It's a signature bridge, and our intent is to make

sure Marble Falls is proud of it when it's done."

After the concrete is poured in the footing, the forms come off and move to the next location.

"It's pretty simple, really, except we are pouring concrete under water," Weight said.

After the footings are built, contractors will build the columns that go on top of the footing. Following column construction, erection of the actual bridge begins.

The bridge construction project began in November 2010 and is expected to continue for four years, Weight said.

Less than a mile away from the bridge, another TxDOT project is taking shape on FM 2147, where crews are resurfacing and widening a nearly 2 1/2-mile stretch of highway beginning at the road's intersection with US 281.

The improvements to the road include isolated turn lanes and the addition of shoulders, with a new surface being poured over the

entire stretch of roadway.

Crews began working between the hours of 9 p.m. and 6 a.m. on Sunday after daytime work on the road's surface caused traffic delays that left some motorists stuck in traffic for up to 45 minutes.

Work on the road's surface is being done at night, but daytime crews are continuing to move dirt and work on the shoulders, which doesn't interfere with traffic, Weight said.

The entire FM 2147 project is expected to last 60 days.

Weight said TxDOT was working to address construction-related traffic slowdowns north and south of the bridge and FM 2147 in Marble Falls by adjusting the timing of traffic signals along US 281.

"As far as the signals are concerned, it's not that they are out of sync, it's that we had to go to what we call a 'split phase' timing because of the wall construction on (the south side) of (the US 281 bridge)," Weight explained. "It has resulted in some additional time getting through the signal. We are tweaking that timing as we speak. It might help a little."

Marble Falls City Manager Ralph Hendricks spoke with TxDOT officials last week and requested placement of signs warning motorists of possible traffic delays, a request that Weight said TxDOT officials planned to honor. Bright orange signs warning motorists of possible traffic delays on FM 2147 are positioned on US 281.

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