



Feb. 4, 2005 - Folsom Dam bridge expected to be done by 2007

By JONATHAN SCHWARZBERG Staff writer

People who want to travel across the Folsom Dam are still out of luck as the road used to cross the dam remains blocked due to security concerns.

However, the dam road may yet reopen during peak hours, and a new bridge appears to be on the way with city officials pushing for an opening by the end of 2007.

The road was closed in 2003 because of security concerns. If the dam broke, the water released could flood much of the Sacramento region.

But the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation has closed the comment period on an environmental analysis looking at reopening the road and is expected to reach a decision this spring.

One of the area's representatives to Washington, D.C., says the USBR is listening to the concerns of local residents and has not given up on finding a solution in the near future.

Congressman Dan Lungren, R-Gold River, said he had a "secret level briefing" within the past few days. He said the bureau has not made a final decision yet but appears to be taking the comments of Folsom residents anxious for some traffic relief very seriously.

"I do not want to give people false hope," Lungren said. "But I'm satisfied that they are not doing anything that would be viewed as an in-your-face to the city of Folsom."

Officials from the city say opening the road during peak hours would help alleviate the traffic problems that have plagued the Folsom area since the closure of the road.

"We hope that the results of that study will show that they are going to pick a preferred alternative where the road will be partially reopened until the bridge is available," said Rich Lorenz, Folsom's director of public works.

He said that if the city was allowed to reopen the dam road during peak hours, Folsom would be responsible for additional security. He said this would include checkpoints on each side of the road, along with some kind of permitting system. Certain vehicles, like trucks, would never be allowed across the bridge.

All this would cost money, though, but Lorenz said city officials have heard that some money for operational projects like this may be available through the Department of Homeland Security.

As a member of the Homeland Security Committee, Lungren said this is a possibility, but that he couldn't promise anything.

"It would be premature for me to say that yes, I think those funds are available," Lungren said.



THE PROPOSED BRIDGE to move Folsom Dam Road off of Folsom Dam would follow the alignment marked in yellow. An earlier proposal for a temporary bridge would have followed the blue line marked on this aerial photo provided by former congressman Doug Ose. See story, " Folsom Dam bridge expected to be done by 2007."

Laura Blackann, a spokeswoman for Congressman John Doolittle, R-Rocklin, said the congressman wants to make sure both the security concerns and the traffic concerns are met and that he believes a solution can be reached whether this is through a new bridge or opening up the road part-time.

"He is open to looking into anything that can alleviate the traffic and congestion problems that the road closure has caused," Blackann said.

Lungren said Washington is definitely listening to Folsom's concerns.

"I really do get the very strong feeling that those concerns and the good faith approaches taken by the city are being seriously considered," Lungren said. "I think they're having an impact."

However, the dam road is not likely to ever be opened up again completely free of restrictions. This means Folsom needs to look for a permanent solution. Lorenz said the city of Folsom is looking at opening a bridge by the end of 2007 if they can get federal help.

"To me, the ultimate fix in this would be the rapid construction of the additional bridge," Lungren said.

Last year, the federal government approved \$66 million in funding for a new bridge. However, this money still needs to be appropriated for use. So far, Lorenz said about \$5.6 million has been set aside and that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is using this to prepare the environmental documentation needed for a new bridge.

Lorenz said that while the \$66 million would cover a two-lane bridge, the city is looking at plans to upgrade this structure to four lanes. He said the city would need to pitch in additional funds for this, but that this money could come from a transportation tax recently approved by voters in Sacramento County.

Lorenz said the Bureau of Reclamation and the Army Corps of Engineers had originally planned to construct a temporary bridge in Folsom to lessen traffic while the departments worked on a larger flood control project that would include raising the dam level. After the road was closed, this temporary bridge no longer seemed feasible.

"We felt it made more sense to build a permanent bridge," Lorenz said.

Lungren agreed and said he is going to try to make a new bridge a high priority whether the dam road is opened part-time or not.

"I think we've got a good argument that we ought to have that bridge built sooner rather than later, even made a priority during these tight budget times," Lungren said.

Jonathan Schwarzberg can be reached at jschwarzberg@mtdemocrat.net or 344-5062.