

West Chicago and Extra

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"It isn't the end of the world, but it means that I end up being a bit late to dinner at their house."

— Ted Cockle, on life after the loss of the Wesley-Manchester bridge



Labor foreman Bruce Kopale, left, and laborer Frank Ortiz cut into the timber deck of the Wesley Street-Manchester Road bridge over the Union Pacific railroad tracks in Wheaton. The bridge, which dates to 1877, was demolished, to be replaced this fall by a \$9.3 million, three-lane bridge. CHUCK BERMAN/TRIBUNE PHOTOS

Bridge is over and out

Drivers took for granted the old Wesley-Manchester span in Wheaton

By Bob Goldsborough
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Wheaton College student Ted Cockle frequently drove the Wesley Street-Manchester Road bridge over the Union Pacific railroad tracks on his way to visit his brother and sister-in-law on the west side.

Now, with the aging overpass west of downtown removed a few weeks ago, he finds himself stuck at a nearby grade crossing, waiting for long freight trains to pass.

"It isn't the end of the world, but it means that I end up being a bit late to dinner at their house," he said.

His routine and that of close to 10,000 motorists a day who used the old two-lane bridge have been altered in preparation for a \$9.3 million bridge scheduled to open at the end of October. The old structure was closed in November, and in late March contractors began removing the asphalt decking and have dismantled everything, including the beams and truss frame.

The new bridge will be three lanes, kinked slightly to the west. A traffic signal will permit motorists to make turns in all directions,

something they couldn't do before, said Paul Redman, the city's director of engineering.

The old bridge was fabricated in 1877, but the Chicago & North Western railroad — which later was sold to the Union Pacific — did not move the bridge's main structural component to



R.J. Hopper uses a torch to cut the trusses of the bridge at Wesley Street and Manchester Road in Wheaton. The bridge was closed to traffic in November.

Wheaton until 1917. Immediately before coming to Wheaton, the structure had been part of a three-truss span that the C&NW used over a river in Iowa, Redman said.

In recent decades, the bridge's weight load was limited to 5 tons, preventing even city firetrucks from using it, and by the mid-1990s, Wheaton officials began discussing replacing it. Those conversations accelerated — for a time, at least — after a locomotive engineer in June 1998 saw a steel beam hanging from the underside of the overpass.

The bridge was closed six months for repairs. Plans for a new bridge stalled for years after that, amid delays by the Illinois Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration and later by the city, which was to own the bridge but needed a way to fund it.

As the economy worsened in the past few years, the cost to replace the bridge ended up costing half what had been estimated. IDOT awarded the project last summer at a bid of \$9.3

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CHICAGOLAND EXTRA



A crane lifts a piece of the timber deck cut by laborer Frank Ortiz, foreground. Demolition of the Wesley Street-Manchester Road bridge was completed recently. **CHUCK BERMAN/TRIBUNE PHOTO**

Old Wheaton bridge is now a memory

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million, Redman said. Glendale Heights-based Dunnet Bay Construction is doing the work.

Wheaton will contribute about \$2 million, and Union Pacific will pay about \$600,000, Redman said. IDOT, the Illinois Commerce Commission and DuPage County will pay the

remainder, he said.

The bridge will have a weight limit allowing firetrucks and school buses to cross, officials said.

Bikers and pedestrians will notice rehabilitated and elevated extensions north of the nearby Illinois Prairie Path bridge over the tracks.

Cockle said the improvements sound great and that he has much

more appreciation for the crossing, which is the only automobile grade separation along the tracks between Taylor Avenue in Glen Ellyn and County Farm Road on the Wheaton-Winfield border.

"I have noticed how much I relied on that overpass," he said. "I'm anxiously awaiting the completion of the new bridge."