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URGENT

New Nine-Span could be unwrapped before Christmas

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John Luke, The Times

The new bridge on Indianapolis Boulevard between Summer and Michigan Avenue is nearly complete, replacing the Span Bridge. The Indianapolis Boulevard bridge was once one of the busiest north-south routes in Hammond, according to traffic counts. Dunnet Bay Construction, of Glendale Heights, Ill. did both the demolition of the old span, and construction of the new bridge.

The Indiana Department of Transportation plans to open the replacement bridge for the demolished Nine-Span Bridge in Hammond the week of Dec. 9, a few weeks ahead of schedule.

Demolition of the old span that carries cars over the Gibson Yard rail facility on Indianapolis Boulevard began in January with construction of the new bridge following.

"It's always nice to open something earlier than expected," said INDOT spokesman Matt Deitchley. "And that should be the case with this bridge."

Dunnet Bay Construction, of Glendale Heights, Ill., had the \$18 million contract for demolishing the Nine Span Bridge and constructing the new one. Final tasks such as the installation of light poles are now taking place.

The high profile of the nine sections of rusty steel truss spans that made up the former 1930s-era bridge was one of Hammond's most recognizable landmarks.

The Nine-Span Bridge was rated as being in "poor" condition before it was closed for demolition, according to an inventory of bridge conditions kept by the Federal Highway Administration. It underwent major repairs eight years ago. In recent years, some heavy trucks were banned.

The new bridge is strikingly different in appearance, with clean sweeping lines formed by its long concrete beams and parapets and a driving surface with no superstructure above. It has sidewalks on both sides.

Deitchley said no name has been picked out for the new bridge, although it is likely people will continue to call it by the same name as the former bridge for some time.

Indianapolis Boulevard at the Nine-Span Bridge was one of the busiest north-south routes in Hammond, according to INDOT traffic counts. It served as a gateway to East Chicago and a South Shore train station.

One span of the former bridge was kept intact and is now stored away. INDOT is waiting for the right proposal from any organization that may want to use it. INDOT has done the same before with similar bridges in other parts of the state and they commonly are used for bike or walking trails.