

INFORMATION RELEASE



Office of the Director

ARKANSAS STATE HIGHWAY AND
P. O. Box 2261 – Little Rock, Arkansas
Telephone (501) 569-2227

TRANSPORTATION DEPARTMENT
ArkansasHighways.com
Twitter: @AHTD

Contact:
Randy Ort/Jeff Whatley

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FIRST SECTION OF THE BELLA VISTA BYPASS TO OPEN TUESDAY

LITTLE ROCK (4-21) -- The first useable section of the long-awaited Bella Vista Bypass will open to traffic Tuesday, April 22, 2014, according to officials from the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD). State and local officials will cut a ribbon to signify the opening at approximately 10:30 a.m. at the intersection of Highway 72 and the new roadway just east of Hiwasse.

The segment that will open Tuesday extends approximately three miles from Highway 72 on the west side of Hiwasse to Highway 72 on the east side of Hiwasse. A \$19.9 million contract was awarded to APAC-Central, Inc., of Fayetteville in 2011 for the work. This initial section is a two-lane route, but it will be widened to a four-lane divided, interstate route in the future. The route will be designated State Highway 549 but it will also feature 'Future I-49' signs.

"This is a historic day for northwest Arkansas," said Dick Trammel of Rogers, Vice Chairman of the Arkansas Highway Commission. "Not only are we celebrating the end of this first contract and the opening of this roadway, but we're also celebrating the future as we get a glimpse of what lies ahead, when we complete the rest of the bypass."

AHTD Director Scott Bennett pointed out that more construction is already taking place on the bypass. "We have a \$13.7 million contract underway from Hiwasse northward to County Road 34 on the west side of Bella Vista that should be complete before the end of this year," Bennett noted. "And we've just awarded a \$52.6 million contract to extend the bypass east from Hiwasse to I-49 on the north side of Bentonville. We hope to be driving on that section by the spring of 2016."

The final two projects – the full interchange at I-49 in north Bentonville and the 2.5 mile section from County Road 34 north to the Missouri line – will get underway once Missouri provides us with their timeline to complete the final section in that state, Bennett said. "The good news is the people of Arkansas have already funded Arkansas' entire section through the Connecting Arkansas Program. So it's no longer a matter of 'if' we build the bypass, it's 'when' we build it."

