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TRANSPORTATION

Making tracks

Interstate 49 taking shape around Texarkana

By BRANDY S. CHEWNING ■ Texarkana Gazette

The wheels are turning on a project to connect two major highways in Texarkana, Ark. The nearly 8-mile stretch will be named Interstate 49, tying into U.S. Highway 71 near Fun Country and state Highway 245 near Arkansas Boulevard.

The time frame to construct the \$100 million road extends to spring 2013, but it is expected to be finished and open to traffic within a year.

“Nothing is complete 100 percent. By the end of December, this contractor thinks they will be 95 percent complete with the concrete paving,”

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said William Cheatham, engineer with the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department.

Asphalt ribbons are a base for what will eventually be concrete traffic lanes at least a foot thick and cut with tiny grooves for traction.

“There’s 6 inches of crushed aggregate mixed with cement, we call it cement-treated base,” Cheatham said. “It goes down first, then we put 1 inch of asphalt over the top of it, which is a bond breaker.”

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Local heads international group aimed at getting corridor built

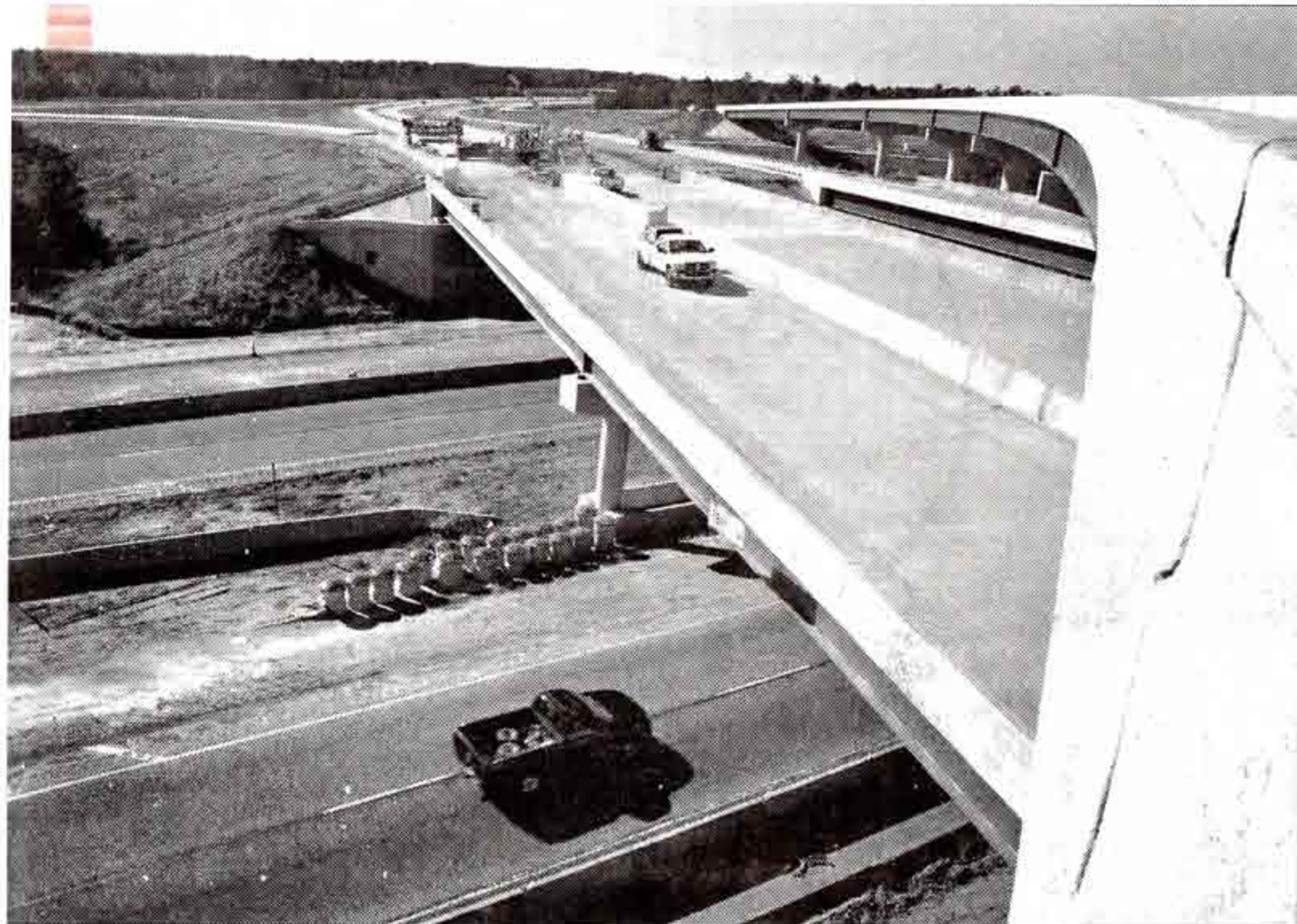
By KRISTIE AVERY
Texarkana Gazette

Work on Interstate 49 inside Texarkana, Ark., is moving along, but it’s the work outside city limits that seems to be dragging its heels.

The interstate project to connect New Orleans with Canada is about 80 percent complete. It would affect 12 states—Minnesota, Wisconsin, North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana.

The north-south interstate system is projected to reduce road congestion, be a hurricane evacuation route and touch those along its path with the fingers of economic development.

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“Concrete expands and contracts. That bond breaker allows it to move freely on top of that cement-treated base.”

On the bridges, metal finger joints allow the bridge to move without damage. The new bridges serve as a type of bird condo for cliff swallows, which are part-time residents.

Construction work has to be timed around the nesting habits of the migratory birds.

“The problem is, they’re protected. We call it the bird law (Migratory Bird Act), but we cannot do any work on bridges if those nests are live and active,” Cheatham said.

The construction’s path went

through several ponds formerly used for mining clay. Unusable material at the base of the bridge had to be dug out and replaced with sand, some of which is coming from a pit just north of the Red River on Highway 71.

“It’s good river sand, which is good for building roads,” Cheatham said. The sand is also helping repair a slide on another road in the AHTD district.

When the local project is finished, Sanderson Lane will have access to I-49; Sugar Hill Road will not.

Closures on Interstate 30 are over, now that the bridges are up, but one lane of Highway 71 is barricaded where the new road will connect. Cheatham said the closure would probably last another month.

Approximately \$38 million of the contract is for pav-

ing. Earthwork and bridges from Highway 71 to Arkansas Boulevard are \$62 million. Interstate Highway Construction, based in Englewood, Colo., has the contract.

Part of the project is replacing the concrete on Highway 245 from U.S. Highway 67 to Arkansas Boulevard.

Earlier in the month, a contract to construct six bridges on the future I-49 was awarded to AUI Construction Group LLC of Fort Worth, Texas. The contract is \$6,992,399.09.

The bridges will be on the new Highway 71 alignment between Doddridge, Ark., and the Louisiana line.

Much of the I-49 work in nearby Louisiana is also done, though its exact path near Shreveport is undetermined.

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Staff photo by Evan Lewis

■ An Interstate 30 interchange is visible from one of the new bridges that will be part of Interstate 49 in Texarkana, Ark. The project should be complete within a year and loop from State Highway 245 to U.S. Highway 71.