

Willimansett bridge reopens to Holyoke-Chicopee traffic after \$26.5 million renovation

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HOLYOKE -- The Willimansett Bridge between South Holyoke and Chicopee reopened to vehicle traffic Thursday after a four-year, \$26.5 million renovation.

"This is another exciting day for the city of Holyoke," Mayor Alex B. Morse said.

"It's going to be so much easier for every commuter, every resident, every business person. It's finally finished and I want to say thank you," said state Sen. Donald R. Humason, R-Westfield.

The 800-foot-long, 124-year-old bridge had structural problems that caused a weight restriction that banned large trucks. The bridge links Cabot Street in Holyoke with Chicopee Street in Chicopee over the Connecticut River.

The detouring of traffic because of the bridge being unavailable hurt nearby businesses. Owners of C-Town Supermarket at 13 Cabot St., Capri Pizza at 18 Cabot St. and Napa Auto Parts at 2 Cabot St. all said they had to lay off employees.

The bridge closed in August 2011. It was supposed to reopen in May 2014. But work stopped in September 2013 after the contractor, Pihl Inc., of Denmark, declared bankruptcy.

Northern Construction Service, LLC., of Palmer, completed the project. Northern Construction was the second-lowest bidder, but since the contract was made with American International Group, the insurance company which held the bond for the now-bankrupt Pihl Inc., of Denmark, they did not have to follow the state procurement process and that allowed work to resume sooner than if rebidding had to be done, officials said.

The contract called for Northern Construction Service to finish the Willimansett Bridge project by July, meaning the job is done a month ahead of that schedule. Had the company missed the deadline, it would have faced a daily fine of \$6,200 until the bridge reopened.

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