

## \$6.1 million is OK'd to fix up Stanton bridge

**AUSTIN** -- The Stanton Street bridge will be the first of two El Paso international bridges to get a face-lift after the Texas Transportation Commission on Thursday approved a \$6.1 million loan to pay for canopies and public facilities for crossers.

It's one of two projects through which the city plans to transform the appearance of international bridges Downtown. Instead of looking like what one former mayor called prison entrances, the bridges will be welcoming to the city's thousands of daily visitors from south of the border.

"We're hoping to make it aesthetically pleasing, an event going through there," said Daryl Cole, El Paso director of streets and international bridges.

The loan, which the city will repay over 15 years with bridge-crossing tolls, will pay for a canopy over the Stanton pedestrian bridge, restrooms, drinking fountains, new technology at the tollbooths and a new administration building.

Benches and trees will also help create pleasant gathering areas.

City officials said construction could begin as soon as the summer and could be completed in about a year.

The Paso del Norte Bridge will get similar treatment if the commission approves another loan to the city. That loan was not up for approval at Thursday's meeting, Cole said, because the city is still working to complete studies needed for the application.

All totaled, the two projects along with upgrades to Lions Placita will cost about \$17.5 million, Cole said. The Paso del Norte Bridge, which last year was crossed daily by more than 9,000 cars and more than 16,000 pedestrians, will get new toll collection booths, canopies covering pedestrian paths in both directions, restrooms and water fountains, Cole said.

"It will change the whole flow and view in that area," he said.

He said the project is meant to complement U.S. Customs and Border Protection's ongoing \$26 million project, which will add nine pedestrian inspection lanes and two additional vehicle inspection lanes at the congested port of entry.

Kenneth Min, who owns El Centro men's clothing store near Paso del Norte Bridge, said the upgrades would be good for business.

His shop, he said, is famous for letting travelers use the restroom after waiting hours to cross into the United States.

"Most people come from Mexico, and they haven't used the bathroom for a while," Min said.

But he said the potty breaks don't always result in sales, so he doesn't think he will lose business when the public facilities open.

An inviting environment at the bridges will show El Paso's respect for the many visitors who choose to do business in the city, said Mike Breitinger, executive director of the Central Business Association.

"For too long," Breitinger said, "we've taken the traffic from the south for granted."

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