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Bridge Job Done Ahead Of Schedule

By Bobby Cuza
STAFF WRITER

Traffic along the Williamsburg Bridge got some badly needed relief yesterday with the reopening of the span's two northernmost lanes more than a month ahead of schedule.

The completion of the North Outer Roadway project means trucks can again use the bridge to cross into Manhattan. Since January, when construction limited traffic to two lanes in each direction, Manhattan-bound trucks had been banished to the Manhattan Bridge or the Queens-Midtown Tunnel.

Under the new traffic pattern, six of eight lanes will be open: four Manhattan-bound and two Brooklyn-bound during the weekday rush — 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. — and four Brooklyn-bound, two Manhattan-bound at all other times.

The project's early completion means a $5 million windfall for Yonkers Construction. The firm had an incentive written into its contract guaranteeing $100,000 for each day the roadway opened ahead of the target date: Jan. 29, 2002.

By providing incentives, "you avoid the unnecessary cost of overruns that happens when projects go too long," Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said during yesterday's ribbon-cutting ceremony. The early reopening also alleviates gridlock "during the shopping part of the holiday season, when we need it most," Giuliani said.

Yonkers expects to finish rehabilitating the north inner roadway — the two lanes still closed to traffic — by next summer.

As part of its $202 million contract, Yonkers will also construct a new walkway and bike path.

When complete, the city will have spent nearly $700 million over seven years to repair the 98-year-old bridge, which opened in December 1903.

Staff writer Dan Janison contributed to this story.

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