

Ingram Road shortcut set to close

By John W. Gonzalez

Route to 410 crossing over two creeks has been a flood hazard, so an illuminated four-lane bridge will be built in 2011.

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Photo: John Davenport/Express-News

Vehicles drive through a low-water crossing on a bumpy, two-lane stretch

of Ingram Road between Potranco Road and Northwestern Drive. A bridge project will start next month.

Photo: John Davenport/Express-News

For motorists on the Northwest Side, the bumpy stretch of Ingram Road between Potranco Road and Northwestern Drive is a favorite shortcut to and from Loop 410, but to those concerned about flash-flood dangers, the busy two-lane segment represents a long-ignored hazard.

The low-water crossings at Leon and Huebner creeks have been the sites of many high-water rescues over the years — often involving drivers who ignored barricades in the darkness.

Come Jan. 17, the 1/3-mile road segment will close for at least nine months to allow construction of an illuminated four-lane bridge over the flood-prone creeks. Motorists will have to find alternate routes around the bridge work, such as Loop 410, until well into the fall.

The long-contemplated project, costing \$7.4 million, is being financed through a flood-control initiative approved by Bexar County voters in 2008, in response to the major floods in 1998 and 2002.

Originally projected at \$12 million, the Ingram Road bridge's cost is lower than expected due to strong competition in the construction industry prompted by the economic downturn. On Tuesday, commissioner's court awarded the construction contract to [Capital Excavating Co.](#), and preliminary site work is under way.

Since 2009, the county has held three public meetings to alert the

community around Ingram Park Mall about the construction and the traffic disruptions that will ensue. Another gathering is set for Jan. 11 at 6:30 p.m. in Pueblo Hall, 3315 Northwestern.

“We have done a tremendous amount of outreach. People know that we are going to be disrupting their lives,” county flood-control director [Art Villarreal](#) said last week.

Most affected will be the thousands of motorists who use the road daily, and an untold number of pedestrians who beat a path on the road's crude shoulders from Potranco to and from the [VIA Transit Center](#) at Northwestern.

For the benefit of nearby merchants, the road closure starts well after the Christmas season, and construction is slated to be completed before Christmas 2011, Villarreal said. Two lanes of the bridge could be ready by Oct. 31, and the other two lanes should be done by year's end, he said.

The bridge, spanning 1,716 feet, will put motorists 33 feet above creek level. Even in a 100-year flood event, when the usually dry Leon Creek looks more like a raging river, the road elevation should keep it safe, Villarreal said.

For many years, residents who rely on Ingram Road have urged construction of a bridge at Leon Creek. Villarreal said one reason the project has progressed slowly was that the road has been a political no man's land, — it serves as a boundary between City Council districts.

“That's why projects like these never got done,” Villarreal said.

“Bexar County looks at projects regardless of jurisdictional lines. We don't care where the line is drawn.”

A similar situation has stalled upgrades on Roland Road at Salado Creek on the city's Southeast Side, Villarreal said, but work is scheduled to begin late next year on two bridges over the creek — a project also expected to cost about \$7 million.

Ingram Road Bridge project

Span: 1,716 feet long, 66 feet wide

Location: Northwestern Drive to near Potranco Road

Purpose: Raise road above Leon and Huebner creeks

Cost: \$7.4 million

Contractor: Capital Excavating Co.

Construction starts: Jan. 17

Projected completion: Fall 2011