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New bridge to end detour for Forrest Hill commuters

May 29, 2003

By **OMAR SOFRADZIJA**
of the Journal Star

PEORIA - A seven-month detour for some Forrest Hill Avenue commuters will end Friday, when the Forrest Hill Bridge over Interstate 74 opens after completion of a \$3 million replacement project related to the pending I-74 overhaul.

The bridge, a major link between University Street and Sterling Avenue commercial districts, had been carrying about 17,000 cars per day prior to being closed for the project in mid-October of last year.

It was among the first of 20 Peoria overpasses spanning I-74 targeted for renovation, replacement or removal.

When it opens, the four-lane bridge at first will only have one lane open in each direction. The remaining lanes will open at the conclusion of some finishing work, the Illinois Department of Transportation said.

The bridge project was tainted by vandals who apparently removed barricades from the bridge's approaches, leading Peoria police Officer Shannon Parnell to drive his squad car off of the then-demolished bridge and down an embankment onto I-74 on Nov. 30.

Parnell survived, but suffered a broken jaw in the crash.

In the wake of the crash, officials increased surveillance of the work site, anchored barricade signs, added additional barricades, placed electronic message boards at the approaches to the work zone, installed temporary lights and placed large sand-filled barrels in front of the



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drop-off.

During the reconstruction job, the span was completely torn down and rebuilt with new pavement, beams and retaining walls.

The bridge work at time required temporary shutdowns of I-74, most of which were during overnight hours.

Work began on the Forrest Hill and North Street overpasses last year in preparation for the \$461 million I-74 overhaul - the biggest, most expensive road fix ever in Downstate Illinois - which begins this summer.

For more information on the highway project and related delays or detours, call (866) 474-6397 (or I74-NEWS) or #74 on a U.S. Cellular phone, or go to the project's Web site at www.upgrade74.com.

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