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Mild winter could allow bridge to open early

By Ashley Rowland Staff Writer

Here's one reason not to hope for a white Christmas: Construction on the 89-year-old Market Street Bridge could be finished before the September 2007 deadline, weather and other factors permitting.

"We've been very fortunate in that the weather has been good," said Robin Derryberry, spokeswoman for Mountain States, the company doing the repairs. "Now all we have to hope and pray for is that we have a very mild winter. If that happens, then they should finish a little early."

The bridge closed in summer 2005 for a \$13 million, two-year renovation project. Crews soon will begin installing handrails on the bridge, maybe the duller but most complicated part of the work because each one is a slightly different size, Ms. Derryberry said.

"That's going to take some significant time," she said.

Project supervisor Jerry Britton said his priority is finishing work on the south end of the bridge and reopening Riverside Drive before the six-month deadline. But the most tedious part of the job will be forming and pouring the handrails, he said.

"You've got about 6,000 little windows on this bridge, and none of them are exactly alike," he said. "But it sells the job. If you do a bad job on the handrails, everybody sees it, and everybody assumes you did a bad job everywhere else."

When the project began, crews were worried that what they'd find during demolition — the condition of the concrete or steel inside the bridge — might slow them down. But there have been no significant problems, said Tennessee Department of Transportation spokeswoman Jennifer Osborne.

"It's on schedule. Everything's going well," she said.

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