
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier
Ministry of Transportation

PREMIER AND BENNETT OPEN WILLIAM R. BENNETT BRIDGE

KELOWNA – On July 19, 1958, crowds gathered to witness the official opening of a new bridge spanning Okanagan Lake, built to serve as a critical transportation link in the Okanagan. When it opened, the Okanagan Lake Bridge was one of only three floating concrete bridges in the world, and the first of its kind in Canada.

Almost 50 years after Princess Margaret and Premier W.A.C. Bennett cut the ribbon and opened that bridge, Premier Gordon Campbell and former premier William (Bill) R. Bennett used the same scissors to cut the ribbon and officially open the new William R. Bennett Bridge.

Premier Campbell and Mr. Bennett were joined in today's official opening by Minister of Transportation Kevin Falcon, Kelowna Mayor Sharon Shepherd, Westside Mayor Rosalind Neis, Westbank First Nation Chief Robert Louie and MLAs Sindi Hawkins, Rick Thorpe and Al Horning.

“I am honoured to join former Premier Bennett to open this bridge – which is named to acknowledge his contributions to our province – 50 years after his father opened the original bridge,” said Premier Campbell. “This new five-lane bridge, built as an innovative public-private partnership, was completed 108 days ahead of schedule and includes an elevated span for marine traffic as well as a lane for cyclists and pedestrians. It will be a key transportation link between Kelowna and Westbank, and will improve safety, stimulate economic growth and reduce congestion in this busy corridor.”

“This is a historic day for the people of the Okanagan and all British Columbians and I’m honoured to have my name attached to such a great project,” said Mr. Bennett. “British Columbia has always been a place where big dreams come true and big accomplishments are achieved and I want to congratulate everyone involved in this project.”

The \$144.5-million bridge opens to westbound traffic at midnight on May 25, 108 days ahead of the original scheduled opening in September 2008. In spring 2005, SNC-Lavalin Inc. was chosen to design, build, finance, and operate the bridge under a 30-year contract. During that period, government will save over \$25 million in construction, financing, maintenance and rehabilitation costs than if the bridge was built by traditional methods. The corridor is the busiest in B.C. outside the Lower Mainland, accommodating an average of over 50,000 vehicles per day, and that figure is predicted to grow to close to 70,000 by 2017.

“This is a world-class floating bridge – one of only nine of its kind in the world – and I’m proud to say it was delivered on budget and ahead of schedule,” said Falcon. “This new bridge is great for this growing region and an excellent deal for taxpayers as yet another example of a public-private partnership model that outperformed expectations.”

Other key features of the William R. Bennett Bridge include:

- Six floating pontoons, weighing 7,000 tonnes each.
- Three smaller pontoons, weighing 3,000 to 4,000 tonnes each.
- 2,200 tonnes of structural steelwork.
- 25,000 cubic metres of concrete.
- 24 anchors, weighing 75 tonnes, to hold pontoons in place.
- 15,000 cubic metres of Styrofoam fill at the west end of project.

“We are not only bridging our communities in concrete and steel, we are cementing our strengths and our relationships,” said Shepherd. “The new William R. Bennett Bridge is a striking symbol of our partnerships within government and the communities of Kelowna, the Westside, and all those in our Central Okanagan Region. Kelowna’s \$25-million investment is a critical piece in the road network. Without changes to the east approach we wouldn’t have been able to maximize the new five-lane bridge.”

“It has taken the collaboration of municipal, provincial and first nation governments to make this project successful and all should be congratulated for their contributions,” said Chief Robert Louie. “The William R. Bennett Bridge and the associated improvements on both the west and east side are models for how governments can work together to ensure all communities benefit.”

“The William R. Bennett Bridge is a great legacy to our former Premier and will mean easy access for businesses, residents and visitors to the Okanagan, thanks to the dedication of everyone who has been involved with the creation and construction of the new bridge,” said Neis. “We encourage everyone to come and explore the District of Westside.”

Members of the Bennett family, as well as representatives from the City of Kelowna, the Westbank First Nation and the District of Westside joined the Province for the official opening. After dignitaries gathered to officially cut the ribbon, the public was invited to join Premier Campbell, Mr. Bennett and Minister Falcon in a parade across the new bridge. Helping lead the way were 36 Famous Firsts, chosen by the local communities to be the first to cross the bridge in various categories, including the first pedestrians, cyclists, 2008 vehicles, vintage vehicles, wheelchairs, and motorcycles.

“This bridge is a great success thanks to the outstanding efforts of the hard-working crews and an innovative partnership bringing this much-needed infrastructure improvement to completion ahead of schedule,” said Okanagan-Westside MLA Rick Thorpe. “I have been a part of many milestones in this project and I am proud to see it open to residents and serving our communities.”

“I have been raising the issue of needing a new bridge across Lake Okanagan since 1996 when I was first elected,” said Kelowna-Mission MLA Sindi Hawkins. “I am pleased to see that 12 years later we are officially opening it, enabling a smoother flow of traffic for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians through this central corridor.”

“I am happy for both visitors and residents that we have been able to accomplish such a major undertaking so effectively,” said Kelowna-Lake Country MLA Al Horning. “The increased capacity of the William R. Bennett Bridge will stimulate local economies and serves as a monument to all the people who have worked to make this a reality.”

In addition to the official bridge opening ceremony with the Province of British Columbia, the May 25 Bridging Communities celebration featured entertainment by local talent, family activities, heritage and bridge displays and an evening Parade of Light, and a Parade of Boats, culminating in a spectacular fireworks display at 10 p.m.

For more information about the William R. Bennett Bridge, visit www.th.gov.bc.ca/WilliamRBennettBridge.

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