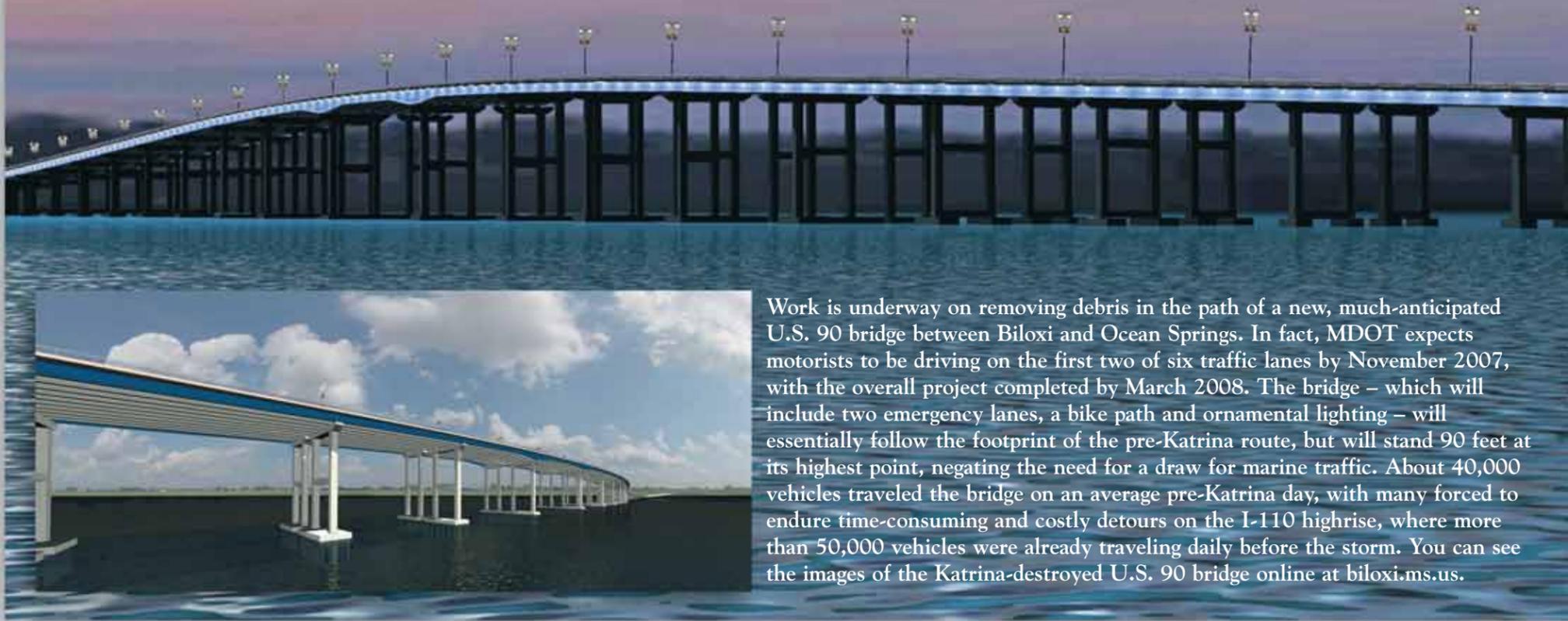


# The look of the future gateway to east Biloxi



Work is underway on removing debris in the path of a new, much-anticipated U.S. 90 bridge between Biloxi and Ocean Springs. In fact, MDOT expects motorists to be driving on the first two of six traffic lanes by November 2007, with the overall project completed by March 2008. The bridge – which will include two emergency lanes, a bike path and ornamental lighting – will essentially follow the footprint of the pre-Katrina route, but will stand 90 feet at its highest point, negating the need for a draw for marine traffic. About 40,000 vehicles traveled the bridge on an average pre-Katrina day, with many forced to endure time-consuming and costly detours on the I-110 highrise, where more than 50,000 vehicles were already traveling daily before the storm. You can see the images of the Katrina-destroyed U.S. 90 bridge online at [biloxi.ms.us](http://biloxi.ms.us).

## On the money

**No city tax increase, \$41 million in major projects**

Mayor A.J. Holloway has presented the City Council an FY '07 municipal budget that proposes to continue the 13-year trend of no increase in city property tax rate and includes \$41 million in capital improvement projects

The budget projects that Biloxi's revenue from casino gaming and sales taxes would reach 87 percent of its pre-Katrina level, but property tax revenue, the city's third primary revenue stream, would be off 30 percent, reflecting the storm's destruction of a quarter of the city's 25,000 pre-storm homes and businesses.

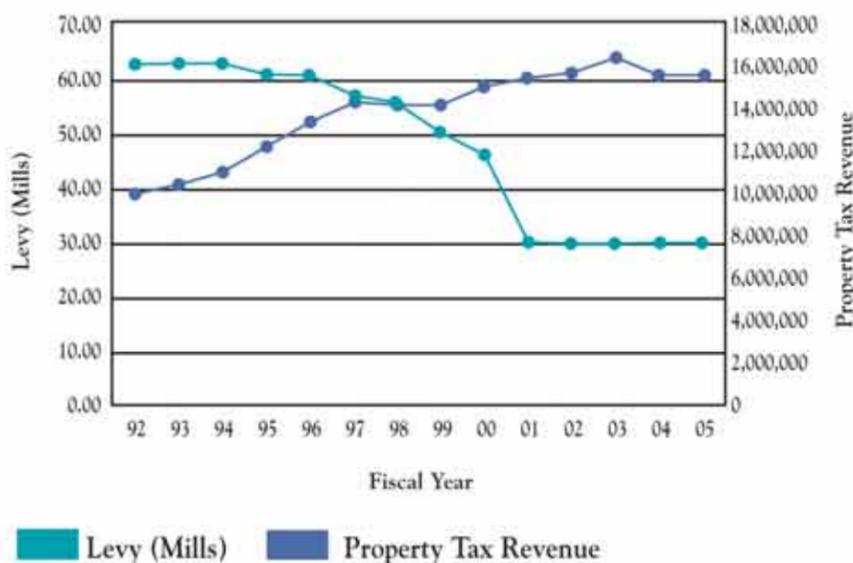
Holloway's budget also proposes to set aside \$10 million in proceeds from the city's much-discussed business interruption insurance to offset the lack of similar insurance, as well as cushion a reduction in the level of property insurance and to minimize any interruption in gaming revenue this hurricane season.

"For years, we've talked about being conservative in the event of a storm," Holloway said, "and, of course, not even I could have been conservative enough to prepare for a storm like Katrina. We are in moderately good shape financially – considering everything – but it's going to be a few years before we're comfortable financially."

Holloway delivered the proposed budget to the City Council Aug. 2. The budget would cover the Fiscal Year 2007, which runs from Oct. 1, 2006 to Sept. 30, 2006. It must be in place in September.

Director of Administration David Staehling told council members that the projected \$6.5 million

Property taxes and tax revenue



beginning fund balance for the budget actually ballooned to \$37.8 million. Said Staehling: "Cost-cutting measures invoked in the wake of the storm – a hiring freeze and suspension of all capital projects spending – reduced expenses by \$5.5 million, and the \$6 million ending fund balance we originally projected to have in hand at end of the FY turned into \$37.8 million, thanks to that measure and \$27.5 million in insurance proceeds."

Staehling and Holloway also noted that more than \$70 million in FEMA reimbursements has flowed through city coffers since the storm for debris removal and other recovery issues, and another \$60 million is pending in requests.

Additionally, FEMA requires the city to use any insurance payments to match FEMA revenue intended to repair or replace damaged city assets.

The budget includes a 2.5 percent pay increase for city employees, but no funding for non-profit organizations, which had grown to more than a million dollars a year in the past several years.

"We still have a huge number of pressing needs, as much as \$50 million in rebuilding the decimated drainage systems under streets throughout our city," Holloway said, "so we're far from out of the woods. It's going to take a few years, but we'll get there."

## Massive project underway to restore street lighting, signage and signals

Motorists traveling the streets of Biloxi will soon be seeing city contractors installing new traffic signals, street signs and lighting as part of the city's \$2.5 million initiative to repair or replace storm-damaged fixtures.

The first phase of the work will begin this month when workers begin a million-dollar, nine-month project to replace or repair street signs and posts on 630 streets, representing about three-quarters of the streets in the city.

And in December, new traffic signals will be in place on Howard Avenue at Reynoir and Caillavet streets, as well as on Eisenhower Drive at Switzer Road and at Irish Hill at White Avenue. Cost of that work is expected to be \$150,000.

The largest phase of the repair work will be replacing the remaining signals and flashing red lights on streets throughout the city and restoring street lighting on a two-mile section of U.S. 90 between Rodenburg Avenue and Beauvoir Road.

That work is expected to be completed by March.

In all, about three-fourths of the most vital of the 61 signalized intersections throughout Biloxi had been restored seven months after the storm. Also remaining to be restored are about a dozen or so signals on less-traveled roadways, including along Howard Avenue, Division Street and Back Bay Boulevard. The city also has a number of flashing red Stop lights and school crossing signals to replace, according to Jason Elliott of Neel Schaffer, an engineering firm that has managed the project for the city.

"This has been a time-consuming process, but we've had to make sure that we followed the FEMA guidelines to ensure that Biloxi taxpayers were not left with this \$2.5 million bill. We certainly appreciate everyone's continuing patience as we've worked through this process," Mayor A.J. Holloway said.

The city has also been able to re-open all but two of the 52 neighborhood streets connecting to U.S. 90. Those that remain closed are at Sadler Beach Drive and Chalmers Drive in west Biloxi.

Police are advising motorists to use caution in these areas, since the improvements were made in only the last week or so.