

HELENA

Part of parkway to open Thursday

By MARIENNE THOMAS-OGLE
News staff writer

A 10:30 a.m. ribbon cutting Thursday will mark the opening of part of the new Hillsboro Parkway between Shelby County 52 and 91. The road will provide easier access to Helena Middle School.

When finished, the \$9.9 million, 2½-mile Hillsboro Parkway will connect Shelby County 52, 91 and 17 and help alleviate traffic tie-ups where the three roads meet. Besides serving the Helena Middle School, it will be the primary road through Hillsboro South, a planned 1,500-acre USS Real Estate residential development not yet under construction.

But Helena officials said construction crews need some cooperation from Mother Nature to put the finishing touches on the rest of the parkway.

The completion of the final 1-mile section, from Shelby County 17 to Shelby County 91, depends on some milder temperatures and sunshine to finish shoulder work and asphalt, said Helena Mayor Charles "Sonny" Penhale. Rain and extreme cold have hampered the progress, he said.

"We hope the entire road will be open in a few weeks, weather permitting," Penhale said.

Work on the Hillsboro Parkway began in 2008 and the project includes a pedestrian tunnel under busy Shelby County 52 for walkers, bikers and small utility vehicles, said Jammie Cowden, USS Real Estate development manager.

The tunnel is about 100



NEWS STAFF/FRANK COUCH

A dump truck rolls over a tunnel on its way to the new Hillsboro Parkway. A 1.5-mile section of the parkway opens Thursday.



feet long, 10 feet high and 24 feet wide, with an arched sandstone facade and limestone trimmed edges.

A 1.9-mile walking trail that runs through the Hillsboro development, the tunnel and to the Middle School is built on top of an abandoned railroad bed and is near completion, Cowden said.

The trail, which is adjacent to the parkway, is 12 feet wide and winds through a natural setting with tree canopies created by years of growth, Cowden said.

"A trail was cut through the woods for the railroad and the railroad has been gone for decades, but the trees have been allowed to flourish," he said. "It's beautiful and people can experience nature right near their

See PARKWAY | Page 25C



NEWS STAFF/FRANK COUCH

Jan and Johnny Campbell ride bikes with their grandson, Jake Martin, along a trail that runs through the tunnel and next to Hillsboro Parkway.

PARKWAY: One mile still to be completed

From Page 15C

neighborhoods."

In time, connecting trails will be constructed throughout the three Hillsboro communities — North, South and Hillsboro — and Cowden said he anticipates the entire project to contain many miles of trails.

"The plans include eventually connecting Helena's Elementary, Middle and Intermediate Schools and providing a trail that will pass through a village center at the corner of Shelby County 52 and Hillsboro Parkway,"

Cowden said the village center will feature small retail tenants, such as food and specialty shops.

"We want it to be a friendly village area and a gathering place for the community," he said.

Penhale said the Hillsboro Parkway will be an asset to the community but cautions the public it is not a bypass and its 25 mph speed limit will be strictly enforced.

"The parkway will cut out a lot of traffic congestion for people driving during school rush hour or traveling to the Middle School," Penhale said. "But it's not a bypass and speeding and big trucks other than those with local deliveries won't be allowed."