LIMERICK'S magnificent new £3.5 million bridge across the Shannon is already proving extremely popular with Limerick Corporation pleased with the amount of people using the new crossing. With the major changes in the traffic system, and the new one way system in operation, it is expected that once teething problems are overcome traffic congestion in the city will be down to a minimum.

The first bridge built in Limerick was O’Deery bridge in 1932, and it was the longest new crossing although different in style, is a magnificent piece of craftsmanship by the workers of Ascon Ltd.

The new bridge was blessed by Bishop Jeremiah Neuman and the Rev. Edward Darlington on Monday, and almost immediately traffic was flowing over the new crossing. It will prove a tremendous asset to people on the North and Southern sides of the city and indeed for those travelling from the Kerry and Cork direction going towards Clare and Galway.

The decision to construct a new bridge from Mallow Street to the North Road represents a major step in the history of the city.

The last river-bridge to be built in the city was O’Deery Bridge. It was completed in 1937. It must be admitted that the completion of that bridge was in isolation, when compared with the great achievement in bridge building during the years from 1854 to 1868. These years saw the completion of Sanfould Bridge, formerly Wellshay Bridge in 1855, and of the reconstructed Broad Bridge in 1857, and Thomond Bridge in 1840.

Consequently, it may be said that Mallow Street Bridge will mark the first major step in bridge building in Limerick city in 140 years.

Traffic
By the early 1970s Limerick Corporation had become conscious of the traffic congestion on Sanfould Bridge and Thomond Bridge and the approach roads, which were rapidly approaching their practical traffic capacity.

Consequently, in 1974, the Corporation appointed a firm of consulting engineers, McCarthy and Partners of Rahoon, County Galway to examine the matter of a third river crossing, and in effect on the city. In October, 1975, the first report was submitted to the Corporation, and in consequence Limerick Corporation Corporation appointed to the Minister for the Environment for a Bridge Order.

After having received a further report on the matter, the Minister for the Environment held a public inquiry into the Bridge Order application in October 1979, and in March 1982, he granted Bridge Order sanctioning a two-lane bridge at Coney Level.

The consulting engineers were then instructed to proceed with the preparation of plans for this bridge, and its northern approach road. A report on the final design for the approach road was received in October 1983, the final plan for the bridge were received in February 1985.

Work had commenced in 1984 on the construction of the Northern approach road, and in early 1985, after obtaining approval from the Minister, tenders were invited by public advertisement for the construction of the bridge. The successful tenderer was deemed to be Ascon Ltd., of Kill County Kildare, who submitted a bid of £3,367,300.00.

The bridge is constructed of precast concrete sections supported on re-inforced concrete piles. Overall length from back to bank will be 213 metres, with 7 spans. The width of the bridge between parapets will be 14 metres, allowing for a two-lane carriage way of 10 metre width and two footpaths of 2 metres width. Freeway between the centre of the bridge and high water level will be 2 metres. Approximately 4,500 tons of concrete and 1,500 tons of steel were used in the construction of the bridge.

Approach to the bridge from the South Bank will be controlled by a roundabout at Mount Kemett, and on the North side, the approach road will have access only from Lower Shiel Durance Road, and from the Ennis Road at Catterallin and Christians. The construction of the Northern approach road involving slow consolidation on poor ground, is programmed to coincide with the construction and opening of the bridge.

The benefit of the bridge to Limerick city and to the sub-region will be both immediate and significant. The initial impact will be to:
- Reduce the overcrowding of Sanfould Bridge and Thomond Bridge with corresponding alleviation of traffic conditions on the Ennis Road, particularly at peak hours.
- Reduce the congestion in Patrick Street and on the Dublin Road with the diversion of traffic onto Parke's Street and Mahon Street.
- Enable the city centre pedestrian network to be more effectively utilised by the incorporation of the traffic system extending from Cress to Thomond Bridge, and from the Ennis to Parke's Street.
- Provide the basis for major improvements in the operation of the public transport by elimination of delays throughout out city centre, and on the Dublin and Ennis Road approaches.
- Designed to carry 30,000 vehicles per day.

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