



Biltmore tunnel to open for crossers

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Biltmore shoppers soon can feel protected from traffic while crossing Camelback Road. Construction for the pedestrian underpass that cuts under the road from Camelback Esplanade to Biltmore Fashion Park is nearly complete. A grand opening ceremony is scheduled for May 5.

The \$6 million project that started last April was estimated to take 11 months. City officials say the holiday shopping season, bad weather and P.F. Chang's Rock 'n' Roll Arizona Marathon were delay factors.

"We really appreciate the partnership with neighbors and the public for putting up with the inconvenience," said Tony Humphrey, project engineer for Phoenix. "It took a little longer than anticipated, but we are finally on our way to finishing the job."

Karen Litton, senior property manager at Biltmore Fashion Park, said that the underpass reinforces Camelback Corridor as a pedestrian-friendly, dynamic social gathering place.

"The underpass joins area workers, shoppers and residents and will have a positive impact on the community," she said.

More than 90,000 cars and 2,000 pedestrians pass through the intersection of 24th Street and Camelback Road every day. After a 13-year-old girl was killed and several others injured trying to cross Camelback in that area, the project got the go-ahead.

A bridge considered

City officials studied several options for the solution. A bridge would have provided pedestrians with a feeling of openness but would have faced strict city compliances, plus construction of the base would have been expensive.

A tunnel would have provided shade during the summer, but safety and lack of light would have become a concern.

The final product was a compromise that engineers believe will leave pedestrians satisfied.

"I'm impressed that we used the word 'tunnel,' because it doesn't feel like you are going in a tunnel, that you are underground," Humphrey said. "We wanted to have an open-air feel and light coming into the tunnel that is an environment people feel comfortable in, and I think we have achieved that."

At 85 feet long, 30 feet wide, 8 feet high, the underpass was accomplished by what Pete Johnson, assistant director of street transportation, calls "a balancing act."

The engineers raised Camelback Road by 6 feet and dug down another 6 feet. As a result, the road in front of the shopping area, over the tunnel, creates a slope. A few individuals have complained about the visibility issue and that it

can be difficult to see cars coming.

"The wall barrier heights are built to the standards," Humphrey said. "During the design process, all those things were considered, and we worked to meet the safety guidelines for visibility for vehicles entering."

Reporter Max Jarman contributed.