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Rollin' rollin' rollin'

Florida Road grand opening marks end of travel travails



Photo by: JERRY McBRIDE/Herald

Dylan Bettin, 6, along with Durango Mayor Christina Rinderle leads cyclists down Florida Road during the road's grand reopening ceremony. The \$17 million rebuild was the city's the largest and most expensive publicly funded project.

By [Jordyn Dahl](#)
Herald Staff Writer

In true Durango fashion, Mayor Christina Rinderle led community members on a bicycle ride Monday morning along a reconstructed Florida Road for its grand reopening.

About 30 people showed up for the ride that started at 10:45 a.m. in Mason Park and ended at Chapman Hill, where a red ribbon and free barbecue from JBo's awaited attendees.

More community members showed up to witness the ribbon cutting, which – to Rinderle's dismay – caused a short detour on the road for the ceremony.

Rinderle quickly invited city councilors, former Durango Mayor Michael Rendon and all the children in attendance to cut the ribbon with her so the road could be reopened to traffic.

"I'm so proud of this road and so thankful that it's done," she said.

It is hoped the detour will be the last for Florida Road after the many delays motorists experienced during the year and a half it took to reconstruct. Traffic was limited to inbound motorists until its soft opening during Memorial Day weekend.

The road faced multiple setbacks, and the opening date was continuously pushed back from its original date of December 2010 because of weather and unmapped utility lines. It cost \$17 million, making the reconstruction the largest and most expensive publicly funded project in Durango's history.

Attendees of the opening expressed their relief that one of the city's most important arteries was finally flowing. Many, including police Chief James Spratlen, said it was a much-needed project and will increase safety for everyone on the road.

Florida Road features 5-foot bike lanes and a sidewalk on either side of the road for pedestrians.

"I think it's a great thing for public safety," Spratlen said. "We're excited that it's open and that we now have access."

He said the construction and detours made it difficult for officers to respond promptly to calls.

Business owners, too, complained the construction was hindering their profits.

On Monday, Concrete Express Inc., the contractor in charge of the reconstruction, showed its appreciation to everyone for putting up with the prolonged headache.

Amber Blake, the city's multimodal coordinator, said CEI spent \$3,300 on prizes and gift certificates from 11 businesses on Florida Road to give away at the reopening. Another \$1,700 was spent on the lunch.

Daniel Stewart, owner of Durango Autoworks on Florida Road, said his business was not affected by the construction, but he is still happy to see the road open.

"I know it was a large project," Stewart said. "I think it looks beautiful, and it's nice to see pedestrian walkways again."

While the road may be completed, City Manager Ron LeBlanc warns there won't be much expansion along the road because there isn't any developable land.

LeBlanc said the road will primarily be used for those commuting into Durango and to provide access to Fort Lewis College.

The road is one of the busiest city-maintained streets in Durango with between 12,000 and 14,000 vehicle trips made daily.

jdahl@durangoherald.com



Photo by: JERRY McBRIDE/Herald

Quin Crist, 10, grabs a slice of pizza during the celebration of the grand reopening of Florida Road on Monday in front of Chapman Hill.
