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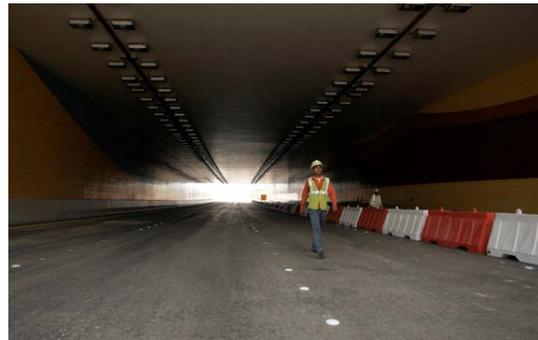
**EMIRATES**  
**Business** 24|7

### **Mideast's longest tunnel to open by end-2010**

*By Nadim Kawach*

Motorists heading for Abu Dhabi from Dubai and other Northern Emirates will be able to emerge on the southern tip of the city without having to go through agonizing traffic bottlenecks when the Middle East's longest tunnel is inaugurated at the end of 2010, project managers said yesterday.

Abu Dhabi Municipality has completed more than 65 per cent of the Dh5 billion tunnel project that also involves long causeways linking the capital with the nearby Reem and Saadiyat islands, they said.



"This mega infrastructure project is part of the municipality's strategic aim to meet the requirements of a developing city, as well as respond to the needs of the growing population. The municipality's efforts are directed towards securing an advanced network of infrastructure and transportation facilities to achieve the highest level of road system efficiency in Abu Dhabi," the municipality said in a statement to Emirates Business at Cityscape Abu Dhabi.

More than 4,000 workers, using giant bulldozers and cranes, are involved in the construction of one of the largest infrastructure ventures in the region.

The causeways connecting the western flank of the capital to Reem Island have been completed and are scheduled to be officially opened at the end of this month. The structures will serve the island, which will become a major development housing nearly 200,000 people.

"The project was launched more than two years ago and will be completed on time at the end of this year. It will be the first free and clear road for traffic coming from the north towards Mina Zayed and Corniche Road," said Abdulah Al Shamsi, Acting Director of the Roads Division at the municipality.

"We have completed more than 65 per cent of the project. The parts completed include the bridges linking Abu Dhabi city to Reem and Saadiyat islands," he said.

The project has severely disrupted traffic and caused massive bottlenecks on Salam Street and the Tourist Club area of the capital, but officials say such problems would be resolved once the tunnel and accompanying flyovers are completed.

The municipality has joined hands with Abu Dhabi Traffic Police in the construction of a spider web-like diversion route system at the northern entrance of the capital to pave the way for the three-year drilling work.

Once the tunnel is completed, passengers coming from Dubai and other emirates will have two options – either to take the expanded surface road into the capital or plunge about 15 metres underground into the tunnel. Those heading for Reem can just turn right and drive along the causeway.

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The tunnel will run underground from the capital's northeastern entrance straight to Port Zayed and other coastal areas in the southern part of the city, where the fish market and harbour, the sprawling vegetable market, the ageing Iranian free port, co-operative societies and other facilities are located.

The project has caused daily agony for road users as many streets has been wiped out and others cut down to one lane. Hundreds of cars and trucks are seen jam-packed on Salam Street and the Tourist Club area most of the time and many of them end up losing their way or taking longer routes.

"This is only a temporary problem. After the project is completed and all roads are open, you will see the benefits of this work. This project is going to alter the face of the western part of the city," Al Shamsi said.

"The project is vital for the capital's development plans in the long term as it aims to cope with the expected large increase in the population and traffic," said Jumma Al Junaibi, Director-General of Abu Dhabi Municipality.

Samsung construction company is the main consultant for this project, part of a long-term blueprint by Abu Dhabi to expand its areas and road network to cope with an expected rise in the population.

### **Tunnel facts**

- Tunnel Part 1 - Contract 1: Running from the intersection of Hazza bin Zayed Street up to the Mina at the Abu Dhabi Islamic Bank. Consists of a 3.1km long tunnel where 2km will be covered and 1km will be open. About 2,000 people are working on this contract.
- Tunnel Part 2 - Contract 2: Stretching from Maqtaa Bridge up to the intersection with Street No31 on the Eastern Ring Road. Consists of two tunnels, the length of each is 850m. About 1,000 people are working on this contract.
- Tunnel Part 3 - Contract 3: Stretching from the intersection of Al Saada Street up to the intersection with Hazza bin Zayed Street. Consists of a 850m tunnel, and a bridge leading to Al Reem Island. About 1,200 people are working on this contract.
- Tunnel Part 4 - Contract 4: Stretching from the intersection with Street No31 up to the intersection with Street No19, an expansion of this part of the street. About 150 people are working on this contract.
- Overall completion rate: More than 65 per cent completed by the beginning of March 2010
- Project total cost: About Dh5 billion