FOND MEMORIES FOR LONGEST SERVING HUME HIGHWAY EMPLOYEE

Barry Herring knows a thing or two about bridges. He reckons he’s had a hand in building or repairing about 100 in his 69 years and he’s only been working on them since he was 16.

Now a Superintendent Officer with Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), Barry from Gundagai is a carpenter and self-professed expert in steel and concrete. He is also officially the longest serving employee on the Hume Highway duplication.

The RMS employee who has worked on the Hume Highway duplication since 1972 and has even demolished one of the bridges he helped build, is philosophical.

“I was 16 when I started as a contractor to help build the Muttama Creek Bridge, which we then demolished to build the Coolac bypass because it didn’t fit in with the realignment," Barry said. The $179 million Coolac bypass was opened in 2009.

The duplication of the 808 kilometre highway upgrade, which sees motorists saving about three hours on a trip from Sydney to Melbourne, is on track to be completed late next month.

On Sunday, the Prime Minister will join Federal Roads Minister Anthony Albanese, NSW Roads Minister Duncan Gay, Member for Albury Greg Aplin and a host of special guests along with the local community in the township of Holbrook to celebrate the mammoth effort of duplicating what was once a dirt track connecting the country’s two biggest cities.

Spanning more than four decades, the duplication moved from small isolated projects to a massive strategic venture which will benefit small communities, road users, the freight industry, police and emergency services for years to come.

The Holbrook bypass is the final link in the Hume Highway duplication and is one of 49 bypasses built as part of the duplication. The Holbrook bypass will steer heavy vehicles away from residential and shopping areas and provide a safer environment for pedestrians in the township.

In all, 205 bridges were built in NSW and Victoria during the duplication of the Hume with 2.5 million cubic metres of concrete poured in NSW alone.

Barry thinks the decades long project is worse than having a baby, and he should know, he’s father to six - three girls, three boys and 12 grandchildren.

“I’m disappointed it’s coming to an end as there won’t be any more bridges for me to work on,” Barry said.

Which is not entirely true, as Barry will be part of the RMS team to install security screens on the Union Bridge in Albury later this year to increase safety for both pedestrians and motorists.

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