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St. Johns Heritage Parkway now open, connecting Palm Bay and West Melbourne

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(Photo: WAYNE T. PRICE/FLORIDA TODAY)

WEST MELBOURNE — Gary Howell wanted to be one of the first users of the new section of St. Johns Heritage Parkway when it opened Thursday morning.

Howell got his wish, zipping along the 3.1-mile stretch on his 1969 Honda 350 motorcycle, just as the new section of the parkway opened at 9 a.m.

"It wasn't necessarily important to be the first," said Howell a Palm Bay resident. "It's just about coming out to celebrate the opening."

Thursday's opening of the latest segment comes about 2 1/2 years after Palm Bay officials opened the first 2.5-mile stretch of the St. Johns Heritage Parkway, which goes from Malabar Road northward to Emerson Drive.

More: [St. Johns Heritage Parkway section to open Thursday \(/story/news/2017/11/01/st-johns-heritage-parkway-section-open-thursday/812660001/\)](#)

More: [St. Johns Heritage Parkway opening delayed by months \(/story/news/local/2017/06/09/st-johns-heritage-parkway-opening-delayed-months/385539001/\)](#)

The new segment of the parkway links Emerson Drive with U.S. 192, creating an alternate route for Minton Road commuters headed to and from Palm Bay, West Melbourne, Melbourne and unincorporated Brevard County.

About 50 people, mainly officials from Brevard County and the cities of Palm Bay and West Melbourne, held a small ceremony on the side of the parkway, just south of U.S. 192 to note the opening of the new segment.

"There have been a lot of people over the years that have brought us to this day," said Brevard County Commissioner Kristine Isnardi, whose District 5 includes the parkway.

Isnardi also is a former Palm Bay City Council member who was involved with the parkway's progress over the years.

The new 45-mph parkway segment cost \$12.5 million, and construction was managed by Brevard County. Thousands of feet of leaking stormwater pipes plagued the project, which was supposed to open to traffic by mid-April. Engineers determined the leaks were caused by a manufacturing issue, and the subsequent underground pipe repairs have a 25-year warranty.

To the north, the Florida Department of Transportation is completing right-of-way acquisition for the Ellis Road interchange. Construction should begin in fall 2018, said Georganna Gillette, Space Coast TPO transportation program specialist.

"I look forward to the path north," Isnardi said.

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