



THE TEAM

WSP's Jordan Salinger, left, Saffo's Aladr Goulaet, and WSP's Pom Chakkaphak tour the Weekly staff around the construction site.



THE CURTAIN

It's deployed when sandblasting the steel beams to catch the particulate matter. The 'Zebra' is the paint truck.



EQUIPMENT

Machines and supplies have been stacked on the old bridge. This machine recycles and cleans the sandblasting material.



SUNSET PARK

The new pavilion and walkway at Sunset Park are finished. There are 10 parking spaces open to the public and allow access to the finished space.

An update on the repairs of Old Seven

We're two years in. The Old Seven Mile Bridge closed to pedestrians in July 2016 and there's roughly another four years until it will reopen; insiders say they are looking at early 2022. The entire project is expected to cost \$77 million, to be split three ways — the state Department of Transportation pays 75 percent (\$58 million), the county funds 18 percent (\$14 million) and Marathon agrees to shoulder 7 percent (\$5 million).

But what, exactly, is going on out there? The old span is littered with equipment and supplies and busy workers, glimpsed only for a second as cars speed across the new Seven Mile Bridge.

"The project is very, very clean," said Pom Chakkaphak, the senior project engineer employed by WSP. Protecting the Keys' unique environment is priority one, he said. The second is the safety of workers and non-workers and the third is site security. It takes a small act from a minor deity to get out there.

The initial plan calls for the state DOT to drop more than \$32 million on initial repairs with the county chipping in \$2.7 million. Over the next 30 years, the county will be responsible for a \$207,000 annual maintenance bill in addition to setting aside another \$5 million that will cover half of the 30-year paint job the county is splitting with Marathon. The bridge is owned by FDOT.

The Old Seven Mile Bridge was decommissioned in 1982 and closed to auto traffic in 2008. Pigeon Key, the five-acre island in the middle of the bridge — or at the end of the old span — is still open to the public. Some of the buildings remain from Pigeon Key's incarnation as a work camp for the Florida East Coast Railway. The buildings are used today for housing for educational groups as well as administrative offices of the non-profit Pigeon Key Foundation.

To visit the historic island run by the Pigeon Key Foundation, buy a ferry ticket from the Hyatt Faro Blanco Resort, 2010 Overseas Highway in Marathon or call 305-743-5999. Tours are at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m. The ferry is the only way to visit one of, if not *the*, most important historical sites in the Middle Keys. As far as the very popular pastime of walking the old bridge, well, that's going to have to wait for a little while.



SAFETY BOAT

Anchored a few hundred yards off the bridge is the safety boat. It's the captain's job to pull anyone out of the drink who missteps. That hasn't happened yet.



THE OTHER BOAT

We think this is a Mako 20-footer powered by a Merc just passing through.



THE SNOOPER

This is a fully enclosed ladder capable of swinging under the bridge from the old span's road bed.



RAILING

The existing railing will be cleaned and treated. A new one will be erected in front of the existing railing to comply with ADA rules.