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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Gov. Beshear, Transportation Secretary Gray, Local Officials Cut Ribbon on
New U.S. 60 Cumberland River Bridge in Smithland**

\$63.6 million project replaces 1930s bridge with safer, vessel-friendly structure

SMITHLAND, Ky. (May 15, 2023) – Today, Gov. Andy Beshear was joined by Kentucky Transportation Cabinet Secretary Jim Gray and state and local officials to cut the ribbon ceremonially opening the new U.S. 60 Cumberland River Bridge in Smithland before a crowd of community members.

The Governor also unveiled new highway signage paying tribute to the late Jim R. Smith, for whom the bridge is named and founder of the company that constructed it. The 1,912-foot-long blue truss bridge is expected to open to traffic today or tomorrow, weather permitting.

“Kentuckians are going to love their new bridge, which will make their commutes safer,” said Gov. Beshear. “This standout bridge assembled at the Paducah Riverport and transported to Smithland showcases the ingenuity used to usher in a much-needed structure that will be treasured for generations to come.”

Jim Smith Contracting Co., of Grand Rivers, was awarded the \$63.6 million contract to replace a neighboring aging bridge, which opened to traffic in 1931. The former bridge, known locally as the Lucy Jefferson Lewis Memorial Bridge, will be demolished in August and crews will complete final roadway resurfacing and finishing work by December 2023.

“Despite numerous weather events during construction, work crews kept this project on schedule and on budget so it could open to the community as soon as possible,” said Secretary Gray.

“Drivers will enjoy wider driving lanes, new emergency shoulders and ample space for farm equipment to comfortably cross the river without halting traffic.”

Jim Smith Contracting partnered with American Bridge Co. to assemble and paint the bridge’s 700-foot steel truss at the Paducah Riverport. The truss then floated by barge 14 miles upstream on the Ohio River to the bridge construction site for crews to work on the bridge deck.

The new bridge is 40-feet wide, with two 12-foot driving lanes and 8-foot shoulders. It also spans the river without piers in the water, eliminating an obstruction for river traffic.

“This bridge is a symbol of the good that we can accomplish when we put partisan politics aside and stick to being problem solvers for our communities,” said Livingston County Judge/Executive Garrett Gruber. “We are grateful to Gov. Beshear and his administration for fulfilling their promise and ensuring that this project was kept as a top transportation priority in the commonwealth. In addition, we are thankful to the General Assembly for taking the appropriate action to get this project across the finish line. And most importantly, we are thankful to the people of Livingston County for their patience in seeing this project through. This bridge has been a long time coming, and we are blessed and thankful to all of those who played a part in bringing it to life.”

The new bridge will provide a significant cross-country link for U.S. Highway 60 through Western Kentucky and a critical connection for local Livingston County traffic. The Cumberland River splits the county, and the bridge is the only direct link for local commuters, commerce, school buses and emergency responders.

“The U.S. 60 Cumberland River Bridge is the only thing we have to make our county one,” said Kentucky Emergency Management Area 1 Manager and former Livingston County Emergency Management Director Daniel Newcomb. “Without this connection, it would be hard for Livingston County government to function. I don’t know a lot of other counties that are divided by a major river. This bridge provides a critical transportation link for our schools, our fire departments, the ambulance service and law enforcement. The opening of this new bridge makes this connection more reliable and resilient.”

New Bridge Honors Former Smithland Businessman

During the event, Gov. Beshear and others unveiled new highway signage that designates the new bridge as the Jim R. Smith Memorial Bridge. The 2022 General Assembly approved the naming as a tribute to the Smithland native and founder of the company that built the bridge.

“Jim R. Smith saw such great potential in Kentucky, especially Western Kentucky, and his diligence and hard work to achieve it was apparent. As a small business owner and dedicated member of our community, he worked tirelessly building roads across our commonwealth,” Rep. Randy Bridges said. “Jim was a family friend for many years. He left a great heritage for his family,

community and all of Western Kentucky. Naming the bridge in honor of him is a small gesture of appreciation and a highly visible reminder of his incredible legacy.”

“On behalf of the Smith family and Jim Smith Contracting, I would like to thank the General Assembly and Gov. Andy Beshear for honoring my father, Jim R. Smith, with this monumental tribute,” said Rex Smith, Jim Smith Contracting president. “He would be so humbled to know that this incredible piece of economic infrastructure bears his name in the place he loved the most, Smithland, Kentucky. It was always his passionate vision for the region that propelled him to risk, build and dream great things for Livingston County. This fabulous structure that serves to connect this county bifurcated by the Cumberland River, will stand to greet its visitors now and forever.”

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