



Cutting the ribbon to open the Laos-Japan Friendship bridge on Monday saw Dr Bounthong Chitmany (fourth right), Dr Bounchanh Sinthavong (third right), Dr Souphanh Keomixay (second right) joined by Ambassador of Japan to Laos, Mr Takeshi Hikihara (second left) and officials. —Photo Phomphong

Laos-Japan Friendship Bridge spans Xekong development divide

Phomphong Laoi

Lamam district, Xekong province: Connecting both sides of the Xekong River to provide a road link between neighbouring Lamam and Dakcheung districts in Xekong province, the new Laos-Japan Friendship Bridge was officially opened to the public on Monday.

The bridge is expected to greatly benefit local people in the province as well as facilitate improved domestic and international overland transportation.

A handover ceremony took place in Xekong province on Monday and was attended by Deputy Prime Minister, Dr Bounthong Chitmany, Minister of Public Works and Transport, Dr



Laos-Japan Friendship Bridge in Xekong province.

—Photo Phomphong

Bounchanh Sinthavong, Minister of Planning and Investment, Dr Souphanh Keomixay, Ambassador of Japan to Laos, Mr Takeshi Hikihara and JICA Laos

Office chief representative, Mr Yoshiharu Yoneyama, along with the governors and officials of Xekong, Saravan and Champassak provinces.

Construction commenced

in November 2014 and is now 100 percent complete at a projected cost of 159.7 billion kip (2.2 billion Yen or US\$21.4 million).

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Funding came as a result of grant assistance via the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

Some 300 metres long and 11 metres wide, the bridge was designed and built to international standards.

It is described as a mixed cable and pre-stressed concrete box girder construction with a load-bearing capacity of 80 tonnes.

Three piers and two abutments are incorporated while foundations support 17 piles bearing four spans.

The bridge also features pedestrian footpaths and lighting for increased safety and accessibility.

Speaking at the ceremony, Director General of the Roads Department, Ministry of Public Works and Transport Mr Pheng Duangneun said, "The Xekong bridge construction project, or the Laos-Japan Friendship bridge in Xekong province, is a priority project of the government, and included in the Strategic Plan and the 7th Five-Year Socio-Economic Development Plan.

The bridge is located on the National Road No.16B, running from the centre of Xekong province to Dakcheung district and the

Vietnamese border."

"The bridge will contribute to the socio-economic development of Xekong province and will provide facilities and contribute to upgrading livelihoods of people in Lamam, Thataeng, Kaleum and Dakcheung districts," Project Manager Mr Ouphong Sompasack told those gathered.

Before the bridge was built, the Xekong River effectively served as a barrier to divide the province in two regarding on-road transportation and logistics.

Until now, boats have been used to ferry people and goods across the Xekong River, an unreliable form of transportation due to varying water levels.

According to JICA, the bridge removes weather-related barriers to transport and dramatically improves road transport access for Kaleum, Sanxay, and Dakcheung districts which have previously contended with higher than average rates of poverty as a result of relative geographical isolation.

Usage is free of charge for both vehicles and foot passengers, according to officials.

Connectivity via National Road No. 16B is expected to facilitate a rise in cross-border trade between Laos and neighbouring countries, bringing socio-economic benefits, particularly for the people of Xekong and other southern provinces.

The increased transport brought by the bridge should serve to boost the income of local people, who stand to benefit from opportunities provided by the increase in visitors and through traffic, particularly those living in previously lesser-developed areas.

The project is seen as an important contributor to continuing socio-economic developments in the area as well as providing an important addition to National Road 16.

It is envisaged that the bridge will help to lend greater vitality to the local, national and regional economy thanks to the provision of a transport link that encourages increased trade and investment.

The increased connectivity offered by the bridge comes in addition to coordinated efforts to upgrade the key East-West Economic Corridor that links the country to neighbouring Thailand and Vietnam and beyond.