After about a year and a half of construction, the new Snowy Range Road bridge over the Union Pacific Railroad tracks in Laramie is nearing completion – a few months ahead of schedule.

The grand opening ceremony for the $23.5 million bridge is slated for 10 a.m., Monday, July 16. Immediately after the ceremony, the new bridge will open to traffic and the existing bridge at Clark Street will close.

The new bridge is an impressive improvement over the old structure. It will carry four lanes of traffic over the railroad and will come complete with lighting and wide sidewalks to accommodate both pedestrians and bicyclists.

The new bridge is expected to last about half a century and is designed to accommodate future traffic projections, said Resident Engineer Steve Cook. This compares to the old Clark Street Bridge, which was built in the mid-20th Century and carries just two lanes of traffic along with a standard width sidewalk. The existing structure was deteriorating and in need of replacement.

The location of the new Snowy Range Road bridge ties into Laramie’s overall traffic plan. Because the bridge connects into Harney Street on the east side of the tracks, traffic will have a more direct east-west path across town compared to Clark Street, which terminated at the University of Wyoming campus. Snowy Range Road, which carries WYO 130 and 230 into Laramie, will also be realigned as part of the project. Instead of connecting into the old Clark Street Bridge, the new road arcs around part of Laramie’s neighborhood west of the railroad tracks and links into the bridge. The new alignment will be wider than the old system and will have a corresponding sidewalk.

"The new corridor we’re building from 3rd Street to I-80 is at least four lanes,” Cook said. This new traffic pattern is expected to help traffic flow better through Laramie, particularly during the evening as people head home from work. Backups on the old Clark Street Bridge and on 3rd Street to turn onto the bridge will be a thing of the past.

The bridge is also designed to be aesthetically pleasing. Black metal fencing and light structures line the bridge, and the color fits into Laramie’s landscape. About $255,000 was set aside specifically to be spent on adding improvements along the realigned Snowy Range Road, including trees, shrubs, and other landscaping. As for Clark Street, the old structure will be removed over the course of several weeks as the contractor dismantles the bridge in sections. Once the old bridge is gone, crews will return to resurface Clark Street – this time, though, without a bridge in that spot.

The new, $23.5 million bridge is being completed months ahead of schedule and will replace the Clark Street bridge.

The new bridge’s design incorporates lighting and wider sidewalks for pedestrians and bicyclists in addition to four lanes of traffic.