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**Thousands turn out for opening day of new Tacoma Narrows bridge**

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**THE ASSOCIATED PRESS**

TACOMA -- Thousands turned out for opening day festivities at the new Tacoma Narrows Bridge on Sunday as state transportation crews geared up to open the milelong span to traffic.

The party started in the morning with a 5K run and walk across the bridge that drew more than 10,000 participants.

Then state Treasurer Mike Murphy and House Speaker Frank Chopp paid the first toll and crossed the bridge in a 1923 Lincoln Touring Car, the first to cross the original bridges built in 1940 and 1950.

The deck later opened to pedestrians who were invited to stroll across before it was to open to traffic early Monday morning.

Officials were estimating that 50,000 showed up to check out the new bridge, based on the number of people who rode nearly five dozen buses that were shuttling people from three different locations, said Melanie Coon, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Transportation.

At 5,400 feet from end to end, the new bridge -- built parallel and to the south of the 1950 span -- is the longest suspension bridge built in the United States since the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge opened in New York in 1964.

The original Tacoma Narrows Bridge, dubbed Galloping Gertie, was the world's third-longest suspension bridge when it opened on July 1, 1940.

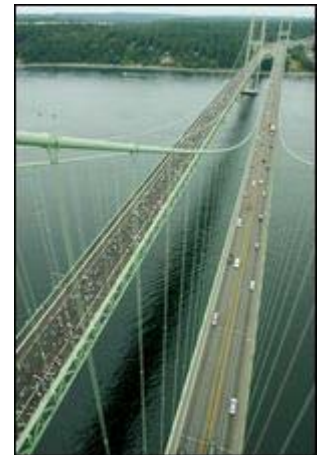
It collapsed in a windstorm about four months later, becoming famous as "the most dramatic failure in bridge engineering history," the Department of Transportation said on its Web site.

The span to the north of the new bridge opened on Oct. 14, 1950. At 5,979 feet in length, it is the fifth-longest suspension bridge in the United States. It was designed to carry 60,000 vehicles a day, but handles more than 90,000 a day on average, the Transportation Department said.

Tolls on the new bridge -- which connects Tacoma with the Kitsap Peninsula to the west -- will be \$3 for eastbound motorists who stop at toll booths, or \$1.75 for those driving in lanes reserved for an electronic payment system.

Officials say more than 100,000 "Good to Go!" toll transponders have been issued to motorists. That's more than twice the number of people who were initially expected to sign up for electronic payment accounts, said Greg Selstead, the state Department of Transportation's director of tolling operations.

An international team of engineers and craftsmen worked on the \$700 million bridge.



**zoom** Paul Joseph Brown / P-

The new Tacoma Narrows Bridge, as seen from the top of the south tower of the old bridge.

Most of the steel and all the cable-spinning equipment came from Japan. The deck was built in South Korea and hauled to Tacoma on Dutch ships. And the 19,000 miles of wire inside the main cables was manufactured in South Korea, China and England.

By the time contracts for the new bridge were being negotiated in 2000, the American steel industry had imploded, while steel-making -- and the expertise needed to build suspension bridges -- had moved to Asia.

Of the 10 longest-span suspension bridges built in the world since 1996, eight are in China or Japan.

The world's longest is Japan's \$5 billion Akashi-Kaikyo Bridge, which has a main span of 6,529 feet. That's more than twice the length of the Tacoma Narrows's 2,800-foot main span -- the section between the two 510-foot-tall towers.

While most of the engineering and design for the new bridge was handled in the United States by New York-based Parson's Transportation Group, the detailed engineering and fieldwork and all the spinning and cable-wrapping equipment used on the bridge were provided by NSK, a joint venture between the Japanese construction giants Nippon Steel Corp. and Kawada Industries Inc.

All told, bridge builders logged more than 3.5 million hours working on the bridge, with only three injuries serious enough to keep workers off the job the following day.

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