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## Widening of I-5 still requires final touches

Salem construction zone speed of 50 mph remains in effect

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When Gov. Ted Kulongoski cut the ceremonial ribbon Nov. 19 on a newly widened stretch of Interstate 5 between Highway 22 and Kuebler Boulevard in Salem, drivers could be forgiven if they thought it meant the end of nearly two years of construction.

There's a little more work to be done.

Three traffic lanes are open on the three-mile stretch from the Highway 22 interchange to the Kuebler Boulevard interchange. But the speed limit is still posted at 50 mph, the same as in the two open northbound lanes, which are separated from a third lane by concrete median barriers.

Spokeswoman Lissa Willis of the Oregon Department of Transportation said the area is still an active construction zone. She said cleanup has not yet been done and wetlands must be expanded on the east side of I-5 to offset their loss on the west side.

"Even though we've had the ribbon-cutting ceremony, there are still details that need to be completed, and that final work will happen in the spring," she said.

Federal law requires mitigation measures for highway and other construction projects that result in a loss of wetlands. A large pond is being created on the east side of Interstate 5 to make up for the area lost when traffic and breakdown lanes were added on the west side.

The widening ends the remaining bottleneck on Interstate 5 between Portland and Salem. Officials say ODOT eventually plans to extend three lanes each way to Jefferson, just before I-5 crosses the North Santiam River.

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