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SERVING SALEM, KEIZER AND THE MID-VALLEY

ODOT program bridges gaps

Major repair projects on highways are in progress, haven't slowed traffic much

BY PETER WONG
Statesman Journal

Oregon's most-ambitious program of bridge and highway work since the interstate system was built four decades ago has enjoyed a relatively smooth ride one-third of the way through the journey.

All of the 174 projects funded by \$500 million in bonds that the Legislature approved in 2001 and 2002 are being designed, built or completed.

Mid-Willamette Valley

drivers have lived with one of the largest and last of those projects. It's a new interchange, 10 miles west of Salem near Rickreall, that will separate coast-bound traffic on Highway 22 from the north-south Highway 99W. It will be finished by December.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski proposed and the Legislature in 2003 added \$2.5 billion more in bonds to be spent over a decade. Nearly two-thirds of the money is to fix aging

Coming Sunday

The Oregon Department of Transportation is breaking new ground by outsourcing much of its bridge and highway work.

state, county and city bridges; the rest is for new projects known as "modernization."

Three years into the latest program, 60 percent of the state bridge projects are being designed, built or completed. Nearly all of the construction contracts have been awarded to Oregon

See ODOT, 3A



TIMOTHY J. GONZALEZ | Statesman Journal

Construction continues on Interstate 5 north of Kuebler Boulevard SE.

HISPANIC
HERITAGE
MONTH

Weekly series

In recognition of Hispanic Heritage Month, the Statesman Journal is reviewing contributions made to the Willamette Valley and Oregon by Hispanics in a series of stories on Fridays through Oct. 13.

Hispanic Heritage Month, which runs through Oct. 15, is aimed at celebrating the culture and traditions of Hispanic-Americans who trace their roots to Spain, Mexico and the Spanish-speaking nations of Central America, South America and the Caribbean.

Today's story is about the Emergency Farm Labor Supply Agreement, Page 1C.

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ODOT

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companies. The budgeted total for the work is \$1.3 billion.

Work is under way to replace seven bridges and to repair one on Interstate 5 at or near the Kuebler Boulevard interchange in South Salem. At the same time, federal funds will pay for the removal of the last bottleneck between Salem and Portland by widening Interstate 5 from two to three lanes in each direction between Kuebler Boulevard and Highway 22.

"The first two programs are moving toward completion," Matt Garrett, the director of the Oregon Department of Transportation, told a legislative committee earlier this month. "The investment we promised is being delivered."

Truckers and other drivers — whose associations fought to a standstill in the Legislature and at the ballot box in the late 1990s about how best to pay for bridge and highway improvements — appear happy.

Because of planning by ODOT and its contractors, traffic delays from construction have been kept to a minimum.

"The department did not have a mobility program in the past, but it has created one and it is a crackerjack program," said Bob Russell, the president of the Oregon Trucking Associations, referring to a plan that focuses on limiting traffic woes. "All the people are pulling together to make sure trucks and cars keep moving."

If drivers have griped about delays, "I haven't heard anything from any of our travel councils about delays and detours," said Elliott Eki, a spokesman for the American Automobile Association of Oregon/Idaho.

Economic effects

Employment directly and indirectly connected to the bridge program has fluctuated.

ODOT reported that July numbers were 1,885 on an annualized basis, down more than 1,000 from the same month a year ago and down sharply from a June peak of 4,298.

But the largest annual growth in jobs will come in the next three years, according to an ODOT report, as the number reaches 4,000 next year and tops 6,000 in each of the next two years.

When he spoke with members at the recent annual convention of the Oregon Building and Construction Trades Council, executive secretary Bob Shiprack said he had nothing but good news.

"Essentially, we're at full employment now, a lot of it having to do with the bridge program," said Shiprack, a former legislator who was a strong advocate for it.

Three years ago, he said, unemployment in construction trades exceeded 30 percent.

Shiprack said the start of Interstate 84 bridge projects next year is especially significant.

"It's an area of the state that has not done well in construction," he said. "It will give a shot in the arm to northeast Oregon because it's been lagging."

The rule of thumb is that for every \$1 million spent on construction, 17 jobs are sustained.

It used to be 18, but rising costs of construction material

Online

Go to StatesmanJournal.com for a link to the bridge delivery program of the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The online version includes an additional story about the background of the bridge project.

als — particularly asphalt and other oil products — have forced a re-evaluation.

Rising costs also have led ODOT officials to revise their assumption of inflation from 3 percent annually to 4.3 percent annually. When the bridge program was proposed in 2003, the inflation rate for the previous decade was 2.3 percent per year.

ODOT's Doug Tindall said higher inflation rates could drive up the cost of completing bridge repairs and replacements by as much as \$110 million more than the budgeted \$1.3 billion, even with many bridges moved into the "no work" category.

It could result in no surplus dollars, which the 2005 Legislature hoped to divert to highway projects of "state-wide significance," such as the Newberg-Dundee bypass, and projects easing truck-traffic congestion.

"While the program has delivered new and innovative opportunities in many areas, it is not immune to the outside effects of inflation," Tindall said.

A controversy

One of those "new and innovative opportunities" was ODOT's more frequent use of proposals for a single contractor or consortium to design and build a project.

It was seen as a speedier alternative to the traditional method of design by ODOT or an engineering firm, then sending the project out to bid by construction contractors.

"In a design-build context, the risk shifts" onto the contractor that also came up with the design, Tindall said, rather than ODOT, which bears the cost of change orders if the contractor winning a bid finds it necessary to make changes in a project.

Designs cost money. "For those companies that are not successful, that's something that goes directly to your bottom line," said Jessica Adamson, the government-affairs manager for the Oregon-Columbia chapter of Associated General Contractors.

"So you cannot afford to be unsuccessful on too many of these. You cannot afford to bid multiple projects at once. For a small business, it is too high a hurdle."

Use it or not?

Sen. Frank Morse, R-Corvallis, was the president of Morse Bros., one of Oregon's leading paving contractors, before he retired in 2002 and was elected to the Senate. He questioned whether the Hayesville-Wilsonville project on I-5 should have been classified as a "design-build" project because much of it involves only repaving, which will start next year.

Some projects package work supported by other state and federal funds and already scheduled under the state's regular four-year construction program, known as the State Transportation Improvement Plan.

"I think design-build is a trend that makes a lot of

Interstate 5 projects

Bridge work completed or under way in the Interstate 5 corridor from Wilsonville to Eugene. This grid does not cover all bridge work scheduled this year by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

AREA	TYPE OF WORK	CONTRACTOR	COST	COMPLETION
Wilsonville-Hayesville	Replace 2 bridges; repave highway*	Hamilton Construction**	\$23 million	January 2008
North Santiam-Kuebler Blvd.	Replace 7 bridges; repair 1 bridge; widen from 2 to 3 lanes in each direction	Hamilton Construction**	\$52.1 million***	July 2008
North Albany Interchange	Repair 5 bridges	Wildish Standard Paving	\$1.9 million	December 2006
Albany-Halsey	Repair 6 bridges on I-5, Highway 34, Highway 228	Hamilton Construction	\$2.2 million	November 2005
Albany-Halsey	Replace 2 bridges; repair 2 bridges	None yet	\$17.3 million budgeted	2008
McKenzie River-Goshen	Replace 5 bridges; repair 2 bridges	Hamilton Construction**	\$67.6 million budgeted	November 2009

*Repaving, scheduled for 2007, is from \$103 million in federal funds for interstate maintenance.

**Hamilton Construction is part of a design-build consortium for these projects.

*** Widening costs are drawn from federal funds secured by U.S. Rep. Darlene Hooley. Total project budget is \$66.2 million.

SOURCE: Oregon Department of Transportation, August 2005

Progress of project

Status of bridges under the 2003 Oregon Transportation Investment Act:

CATEGORY	TRADITIONAL*	DESIGN/BUILD	TOTAL
Not started	43	63	106
Under design	86	**	86
Under construction	38	23	61
Open to traffic	3	2	5
Construction complete	23	13	36
No work	60	11	71
TOTALS	253	112	365

*Design and construction projects are separate.

**Design-build projects are in a single category.

SOURCE: Oregon Department of Transportation, August progress report

TIMETABLE FOR STATE BRIDGES

UNDER WAY, COMPLETED, OR NO WORK: 173 (see details above)

2006: 13

2007: 104

2008: 69

2009: 6

Stages of project

STAGE 1: Involved 23 bridges, mostly on Highway 97, which runs north-south through the center of the state. Some are on Highway 20 and Highway 26, two alternate east-west routes for Interstate 84. That stage is due for official completion in November.

STAGE 2: Covers bridges on Interstate 5 from Wilsonville south to Eugene, on Highway 58 linking the southern Willamette Valley with Highway 97 in Central Oregon, and on I-84.

One of those projects is the rebuilding of two bridges on I-5 north of the Baldock Rest Area, south of Wilsonville, and the repaving of a 24-mile stretch of I-5 between the Hayesville interchange in North Salem and the rest area.

STAGE 3: Involves bridges on I-5 between Eugene and the California border. Although two-thirds of Oregon's population lives within the Willamette Valley, 60 percent of the 308 miles of I-5 in Oregon are south of Eugene. That work starts next year.

"A lot of my members are redoing their systems to put their trucks on detour routes so they will be able to avoid the bulk of this construction," said Bob Russell, the president of the Oregon Trucking Associations.

STAGE 4: The remaining stages will cover bridges on primary and secondary state highways.

New highway construction in the form of "modernization" projects is scheduled to start in 2009, after most of the bridge work is done or under way.

sense in certain areas when used judiciously," Morse said at a recent meeting of the House Transportation Committee. "But to bid a project like this is a simple proposition. The design-build concept needs to be used for special types of projects."

Morse said the "lowest responsive bid" for the Hayesville-Wilsonville project was \$20.3 million, but under the "design-build" alternative used, the job went to Hamilton Construction of Springfield for \$23 million. Others involved in the consortium were OBEC Consulting Engineers, which has an office in Salem, and Oregon Mainline Paving of McMinnville.

Morse also said that some of the criteria on which the choice was based were too subjective, such as how traffic would be kept moving, how the environment would be protected and how the public would be kept informed.

"We have to take every

measure possible to minimize subjectivity in how we decide to spend public dollars," he said. "I think we need to err on the side of objectivity."

Rep. George Gilman, R-Medford and the House committee chairman, said he agreed with Morse's criticisms about how the Hayesville-Wilsonville project was handled. But he was less critical of ODOT.

"The department is doing a good job of implementing this program," Gilman said later.

"It's just that they do not know how to do everything, and they have to fine-tune it. It does not mean we should throw this away because I am convinced 'design-build' is a good trend. It's just that we have to think a little more about how and when we use it."

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