



US Forest Service

Oregon Department of Transportation Region 4

NEWS RELEASE

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South US 97 Safety and Improvement Project Work Begins

BEND – On Monday, April 6, the Oregon Department of Transportation and the US Forest Service are launching a new highway improvement project on US 97 south of Bend. With the completion of the new Lava Butte to S. Century project, motorists will enjoy safer driving conditions and an improved 4-lane highway. This is the first project in Central Oregon in which ODOT will incorporate funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Starting Monday ODOT and the US Forest Service will begin clearing operations for the new two-lane northbound route of US 97. The \$31 million dollar project will widen US97 south of Bend from Lava Butte to the South Century Drive Interchange and provide a 100-foot wide median between 2 northbound and 2 southbound directional lanes. The project will also feature improved interchange access at Cottonwood, and alternative access to Lava River Cave and Lava Lands Visitor's Center.

ODOT traffic projections show the existing highway and intersections fail current operational standards and will increasingly fail to accommodate traffic volumes into the future. Without the improvements, motorists will be subject to increasing congestion, delay and potential for crashes. Improvements are slated to reduce collisions between motorists and wildlife.

Timber falling under contract with the Forest Service is the first step towards building the new northbound highway segment. The sale was purchased by Interfor Pacific in Gilchrist. The logging is contracted to B & S Logging in Prineville. According to Region Manager Bob Bryant, "Timber fallers and loggers clearing the alignment for the new lanes on US 97 will be the first of many people we're putting to work with this project".

Workers will be clearing the new north lanes and the new access road to Lava Lands, Lava River Cave and new access ramps at Cottonwood interchange. They will also be thinning the median between the north and south bound lanes. The trees need to be removed to landing locations by May 15th and hauled to the mill by June 30th.

Approximately 20 people from B & S will be working on the sale. The work can be seen from US 97 and we are asking that the public stay clear of the logging operations for safety reasons.

Contractors will bid on the highway construction element in May. ODOT will begin actual roadway project construction this summer. Work on the project will continue throughout the 2009 construction season and is expected to be complete by Fall of 2011.

ODOT expects that the \$31 million dollar Central Oregon construction job will sustain about 430 direct family wage jobs for the duration of the project, with a multiplier effect to create additional stimulus. It will also provide a transportation asset with long term economic development value for the region.

Additional project information is available at:

http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/REGION4/US97_Lava_Butte_South_Century_Drive/US97LavaButte_SouthCenturyDrive.shtml

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