

Do your potholes qualify for repairs? Not if your street is unimproved

By Lee Braymen-Cleary
The Southwest Portland Post

Toodling about your Southwest neighborhood one day, you spot a blue and white sign, one of the many strategically-placed signs announcing the city of Portland's telephone number to report potholes.

"Oh, happy day!" you shout. "Now I can get that blankety-blank collection of ruts and potholes I call my street filled and get my car's alignment and suspension fixed for good."

So, confident citizen that you are, you phone the Portland Bureau of Transportation as the sign instructs.

When a pleasant – thankfully not pre-recorded – voice at the other end asks if you are a *bona fide* Portland resident whose home falls under Portland's jurisdiction, you heave a sigh of contentment as you answer in the affirmative.

Then you move onto the next question: "Do you live on an improved street, avenue or road?"

"What do you mean, 'improved?'" you ask.

"Is your street paved?" the civil servant asks. "Do you have sidewalks, good drainage, catch basins?"

"Well, um, not exactly," you reply. "But a good portion of Southwest

Portland's residents don't have all of that."

"Then I'm sorry. It's the bureau's policy to repair only maintained roads, those built to standards."

Perhaps you want to hurl epithets, maybe at your car or maybe at your street that resembles a war zone. But consider stifling yourself before you lambast that "do-nothing Portland Bureau of Transportation."

Weather permitting, all policy-worthy potholes are checked out within 48 hours of their reporting.

But a budget is a budget is a budget, and striving to maintain 4,700 miles of byways and major city roads and \$8 billion in assets necessitates no small outlay and explains why our "poor sister" unimproved roads remain unimproved.

Diane Dulken, media relations manager for transportation, sheds light on what is currently fiscally feasible for paving city streets and filling potholes.

"This year's pavement preservation budget is \$11.8 million," Dulken says. "If that funding level remains the same for the next 10 years, we will see the city's paved streets decline. To meet our target of maintaining most city streets in fair or better condition would require \$91.6 million per year for the next 10 years."

One might say that short-fall is our "long fall" and sadly explains the non-improvement of some unimproved streets. But there's hope.

Mayor Charlie Hales, known for his interest in urban infrastructure, is not twiddling his thumbs.

Along with Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick and city staff, Hales is "engaging neighborhood, business and transportation leaders to consider what it would take ensure that our transportation system remains safe and well maintained," says Dulken.

Despite seemingly lackluster funding issues and an overabundance of potholes, the city still forges ahead. It has instituted scores of street improvements since 2013 and will complete many others in 2014.

The Southwest Multnomah Boulevard project is a case in point.



This sign along Capitol Highway only helps if you live on an improved street. Otherwise, forget it. (Post photo by Lee Braymen-Cleary)

So also is the Southwest Vermont Street/Capitol Highway to Southwest 11th Drive project, not to mention one involving Southwest Capitol Highway to Texas Street.

And by all means, if you live on an improved street with a pothole problem, give the city a call.

Any interested citizen can check out transportation topics under discussion by visiting <http://www.ourstreetspd.com>. You will find an exhaustive list of citywide paving, safety, and other improvement projects by checking out the City of Portland's website at <http://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation>.

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Construction starts April 21 on the Newbury and Vermont Street Bridges on Barbur Boulevard, near the Hillsdale exit. The project is expected to take four months.

Traffic will be reduced to one lane in one direction on one bridge at a time, around-the-clock, seven days a week. When a lane is closed on one bridge, the other will have all lanes open.

For more information on traffic impacts, visit the project website at: www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/REGION1/Pages/newbury_vermont/index.aspx

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