

I-84 bridge demolition nears conclusion

70-year-old span gets new surface by Memorial Day

By Kirby Neumann-Rea
Columbia Gorge News

HOOD RIVER — The noisy demolition work on Interstate 84 in Hood River is scheduled to be complete by March 3.

With its phalanx of cranes, forklifts, augers and massive “munchers,” it’s been an unusual way for the state to upgrade a bridge.

“We don’t do many deck removals or deck replacements. Normally it’s repairs and a new overlay,” said engineer Trevor Lutter of Oregon Department of Transportation.

“There’s quite a few steel structures but not old ones like this that are on an interstate,” added ODOT engineer Corey Kunze.

In this case, the crews are taking the bridge down to its steel skeleton, built in 1952, and “all of our structure guys think it looks great,” Lutter said. Kunze and Lutter said the palpable bounce felt on the bridge as work goes on is typical for freeway bridges and evidence of their structural resilience to the weight and motion of regular 70-mph traffic.

Part of the mostly-asphalt freeway, the concrete portion is technically a bridge that dates to when the freeway was first constructed.

Now that the bridge has been whittled down to steel, the next phase is to place a protective coating on the steel, covering the lead paint that has been in place for 70 years, according to Kunze.

Crews will then install what is known as “falsework,” the wooden forms for the new concrete, a lighter-weight composite material that will go down to last the next few decades.

“What they’ll essentially do is build the shape of the new bridge,” said Kunze.

While snow and days of high winds interrupted the flow of work, the project remains on schedule.

“We had a few days with the snow where we were shut down,” Lutter said. “They did a lot of overtime and are caught up.”

Carter and Company supervisor Jim Califf said, “We’ve been putting in some long hours, the guys have been working real hard, but



Carter and Company “muncher” machine, resembling a giant metal horse head, pulverizes 12-foot pieces of bridge deck that crews cut up with saws and torches.

Kirby Neumann-Rea photo

we needed to get caught up.” As slanting rain fell Friday, he joked that, by comparison, “this is great construction weather.”

This is the second bridge deck project between exits 63 and 64 on Interstate 84 in recent months; the west-bound lanes at that location, structurally a separate bridge from the eastbound, was repaired in fall 2020. The western bridge was built in 1962 and added onto about 20 years ago, meaning it required repairs and a new overlay rather than removal.

The first phase of the east-bound replacement was to install a wide catwalk under the bridge to catch material before it falls into the Hood River. Crews worked in 10-foot stages removing first the concrete guardrail and then every piece of concrete coming into contact with steel girders and bolts. All that debris was collected in a hanging tarp and secondary tarps below, brought back up the bridge deck, and



Above left, a load of debris is piled up after the “muncher” machine pulverized the concrete and separated the rebar and other metal. Above right, Steel beams are exposed and an auger perforates another concrete section of Interstate 84 near exit 63 in this view looking east in Hood River.

Kirby Neumann-Rea photos

systematically pulverized, the metal rebar and pipes placed in separate piles. That incremental process was repeated as the deck pieces themselves were cut up with concrete saws, the rebar severed with saws and acetylene torches.

Gnarled rebar and piles of concrete rubble from the bridge demolition will no longer be a familiar site between exits 63 and 64. The

metal is taken to Portland for recycling and the concrete, which is turned nearly to dust on site, is being trucked to Rapid Ready Concrete in Bingen, to become new material that could very well end up back on the Hood River bridge.

Motorists should be aware that the serpentine traffic pattern over the Interstate 84 will remain in place until

the project is done, prior to Memorial Day in late May.

Replacement was needed because as recently as a few years ago, pieces of the freeway bridge were literally falling out, and the lanes became a patchwork of repairs ODOT contractors had done in asphalt or concrete and a composite repair material.

The largest hole was one

three feet wide that appeared overnight about 10 years ago.

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Bill to protect ranchers

The Washington State House of Representatives unanimously approved House Bill 1199, sponsored by District 14 Representative Chris Corry (R-Yakima), which seeks to compensate ranchers and farmers for financial losses when their state-owned land leases are terminated early.

HB 1199 would require the Washington state Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to reimburse lessees when DNR exercises a non-default or early termination provision in a state-owned land lease.

“We’ve worked hard over the past couple of years to bring this bill together,” said Corry. “This legislation is a great example of what can happen when citizens, agencies in this case, the Department of Natural Resources and state government works together to find a solution.”

The Department of Natural

Resources has an interest in leasing to land-tenants who produce high revenues. The revenue generated from state trust lands provides funding for K-12 school construction and other projects throughout the state. According to state law, DNR can use a non-default termination to replace a lessee with a higher-revenue tenant. But when the early termination of a land lease occurs, farmers and ranchers who frequently invest thousands of dollars in the property face tremendous financial uncertainty.

Corry’s bill would establish a compensation formula for agricultural and grazing leases, along with other obligations that would support both land lessees and state interests.

“In some cases, generations of farming or ranching families have worked these lands. This bill balances both their financial investments in the land with the interests

of the state and its citizens who own the property being used,” said Corry.

The bill now heads to the Senate for further

consideration.

The 2021 legislative session is scheduled to end April 25.

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TRASH TALK

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Jared, The Dalles

A. Jared, I don't know of any local options for VCR or stereo recycling. You do have an option in our area for “e-waste” though. The Oregon Electronics Recycling Program (E-Cycles) accepts seven items for free: computer monitors and towers, T.V.s, laptops, printers, keyboards and mice. Three drop sites: Hood River Transfer Station, The Dalles Disposal, and Sherman County Transfer Station near Biggs Junction.

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