

# Engineers: Tear down \$12 million Highway 97 overpass

Will cost an estimated \$2M to demolish

By PARIS ACHEN  
Capital Bureau

SALEM — Engineers with the Oregon Department of Transportation plan to recommend tearing down a nearly completed \$12 million overpass on Highway 97 in La Pine after a geotechnical investigation found the underlying soil is unstable.

The Oregon Transportation Commission is scheduled to hear and decide on the engineers' recommendation at a meeting in Silverton in late October.

Project managers ordered routine soil tests of the project area before construction of the Wickiup Junction overpass began, but the tests failed to detect rare diatoms in the subsurface of the soil, said Della Mosier, an engineer and interim area manager for ODOT projects in Central Oregon.

The diatoms are silica-based skeletons of algae that lived in an ancient lake in the area and sank, forming a thick bed on the bottom thousands of years ago. The lake had been identified in geological maps, but initial tests gave no indication the soil differed from other parts of Central Oregon, where ODOT has successfully built other bridges, Mosier said.

Furthermore, past surveys of the ancient lake had limited information about the characteristics of the soil in the area, said Chris Carpenter, senior associate engineer with Cornforth Consultants. ODOT contracted with



La Pine city officials are briefed about a proposed railroad overpass on U.S. 97 in this file photo from 2016. After spending more than \$12 million on the project, ODOT now says it must tear the partially completed structure down because the soil underneath it is unstable.

Cornforth and used expertise from the Federal Highway Administration to conduct the subsurface soil analysis at the Wickiup Junction project, using boreholes and soil samples from as deep as 280 feet below ground.

In contrast, ODOT's routine pre-construction soil tests involve penetrating and testing soil 125-feet down into the earth, during which the agency identified only a 50-foot layer of volcanic crust deposit and 75 feet of dirt.

"We have been building bridges in Central Oregon for decades and have never encountered this," said Paul

Mather, administrator for the ODOT Highway Division.

The advanced subsurface tests were conducted after engineers noticed two earthen embankments constructed for the overpass were settling faster than expected.

The weight of the overpass crushes and shifts the diatoms, causing unpredictable settlement of the structure, Mosier said.

By the time the conditions were detected, project managers had already completed 80 percent of the project and spent more than \$12 million of the \$17 million budget.

The cost of tearing down

the bridge is estimated at another \$2 million, said Robert Townsend, a project manager in the ODOT construction office in Bend and The Dalles.

The diatoms are common in parts of Oregon's Klamath Falls and Mexico City, where engineers design "floating" structures with big basements that remove most of the structure's weight, Carpenter said.

Engineers, however, don't know enough about characteristics of the soil to determine whether such a design option would work and be safe for motorists on the Wickiup Junction overpass, and any such project

changes would be expensive, Mosier said.

The project was intended to enhance safety and mobility at the intersection of Highway 97 by allowing vehicles to bypass a Burlington Northern Railroad crossing at the location. School buses and vehicles carrying hazardous materials are required to stop regardless of whether a train is present at the crossing. The frequent stops created potentially dangerous situations for heavy freight traffic and other vehicles passing through the area.

The intersection is the last "at grade" highway

crossing of railroad tracks in Central Oregon, said ODOT spokesman Tom Fuller.

The overpass spans a segment of the highway that intersects with a road that leads to a fishermen's paradise at Oregon's second largest reservoir, Wickiup Reservoir, in the Deschutes National Forest. The overpass is located about a 30-minute drive south of Bend.

Highway 97 is considered an emergency northbound arterial route through the state in the event of a catastrophic earthquake that destroys bridges connecting Interstate 5.

Engineers on the Wickiup Junction project plan to ask the commission for direction in October on whether to use leftover money from the project to conduct more tests of the soil in the area or investigate alternatives to make the Wickiup Junction safer.

ODOT Director Matt Garrett also plan to convene a panel of experts through the Federal Highway Administration's Resource Center to analyze problem soils in other parts of the state.

The obstacle to the Wickiup Junction project comes as ODOT is under the spotlight for how it might manage a \$5.3 billion transportation package, approved by state lawmakers in early July.

"Obviously, our eyes are open, but we don't anticipate having this problem in future projects, with such a unique situation," Mather said. "We wouldn't anticipate to encounter this again."

*The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.*

## TEACH: Students can earn college credit for completing the program

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### Coming back

Some teachers take it a step further and come back to a community that's especially familiar — the one they grew up in.

"I myself am an HHS grad," Keefauver said. "We want students to go to EOU, and they're more likely to come back and work in our district or our own community."

Keefauver is not alone. At the beginning of this school year, at least 40 teachers in the Hermiston School District are Hermiston High School graduates.

Keefauver said the number of people that return can be attributed to a positive experience growing up in the district.

"They have an investment in the community," she said. "In rural areas where family tends to stay put, those (things) draw them back."

Juan Rodriguez is a Hermiston High School graduate. He taught the Oregon Teacher Pathways class last year, its first in the Hermiston School District. The Hermiston High School science teacher said when he graduated with his master's degree in 2009, Hermiston was one of the few districts hiring. But it was more than convenience that drew him back.

"The teachers here taught me, so I knew I was going to go into a great teaching environment," he said.

Rodriguez said as the coordinator of the pathways program, he talked with his students about his own experiences but didn't explicitly advise them to come back to their community.

"I think for a lot of high schoolers, they want to explore the world or just get out of Eastern Oregon," he said. "But I think as they get older, they may realize what a great community it is and what a great school district it is."

Lynette Minthorn took a circuitous path back to Pendleton.

A member of the Unfederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Minthorn took her love of basketball from grade school all the way through college, starting at Lane Community College before finishing her playing career at EOU.

Minthorn graduated with a degree in physical activity and health and became a fitness trainer for the Yellowhawk



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Crystal Diaz, Mya Galvez, Faith Spaulding and Juliana Gonzalez work on an exercise identifying the seven different learning styles during an Oregon Teacher Pathways class on Tuesday at Hermiston High School.

Tribal Health Center. But when she got the opportunity to get her teaching license for free through Portland State University's American Indian Teaching Program, she took the plunge.

"Why pass on a free education?" she said.

Minthorn is now in her first year as a physical education teacher at Sherwood Heights Elementary, where she teaches first through fifth graders the basics of physical activity.

As a tribal member, Minthorn thinks children appreciate when one of their teachers has the same skin color or talks in a similar way. Minthorn is one of two American Indian teachers the Pendleton School District has on staff.

Some of her nieces and nephews now attend Sherwood Heights, and she feels that becoming a teacher is a way to give back to the community. "It's good to have people know who your face, who know who you are," she said.

### Lessons learned

In October, the pathways students will spend one class period per week in two fifth-grade West Park Elementary School classrooms, assisting the teacher.

"They will work with small groups, and support the teacher in instruction," Keefauver said. "They will know the lesson ahead of time, and can support in a small-group setting, whatever the teacher is trying to do."

Rodriguez said the oppor-

tunity to get comfortable in a classroom setting before college is beneficial to students.

"I think of students in high school really excited about becoming a teacher, but who don't get into a classroom setting until junior or senior year of college," he said. "OTP exposes students to a classroom, and gives them the first opportunity to cement their desire to be a teacher, or to say 'This isn't really for me.'"

He added that forming a connection with a class, or a specific school, can give students the incentive to come back later.

"It makes those kids feel welcome," he said. "(If) I did my practicum at West Park, I want to go back and teach there. It's part of retaining people."

The students also learn about teaching in different grade levels, and what strategies work well for various age groups. That can include teaching strategies, or even experimenting with different classroom configurations.

Students can earn a college credit for completing the program, which can help them get a jump on their degrees. Keefauver said that because of the program's partnership with Eastern Oregon University, students who receive a C or better in the class can also get reduced tuition at EOU.

Another important aspect of the program is mentoring younger students, Keefauver said.

"When EOU students

become upperclassmen, they can go back and become mentors at their old high schools," she said.

Entering its fourth year, Pendleton's Oregon Teacher Pathway program is close to bearing fruit.

But according to Cooley, Pendleton's pathway instructor, the program hasn't yet made a dent in cultivating American Indian teachers, one of the reasons Pendleton adopted the program in a district that's 12 percent Native American.

Although pathway programs in Hermiston, Umatilla, and Milton-Freewater have made inroads with Latino students, Cooley said the students that have gone through PHS' program are mostly white.

Despite the relative homogeneity of Pendleton's pathway program, there's some reason for optimism.

Matt Yoshioka, the Pendleton School District director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, said the district's candidate pool for teacher and educational assistants has been more diverse during recent hiring cycles.

Yoshioka said the district hired three assistants with bilingual skills this year, quadrupling the number assistants with that asset.

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## DOGS: Police responded to 2,248 dog complaints from 2014-2016

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bite someone. Roberts said in such cases he has to determine if someone provoked the dog.

Level 4 means the dog is at large and bites a person or another domestic animal.

Levels 1 through 4 require owners to erect warning signs about the dog, confine dogs and have them wear special orange collars.

Level 5 is for dogs that seriously injure or kill people or animals, were trained to fight or repeat bad behavior after receiving Level 4 classification. The final level deems dogs too dangerous to keep in the city, Roberts said, and owners either have to relocate or euthanize the dogs.

Pendleton police monitor 112 dangerous dogs, Roberts said. Since 2000, 175 dogs in Pendleton have been classified as dangerous, and 63 met Level 5 requirements.

The city charges \$10 a

year to license neutered and spayed dogs, and \$20 year for unsterilized dogs. But owners of dangerous dogs pay three times that fee.

Milton-Freewater's law requires owners to register and microchip dangerous dogs, and Hermiston also has a law to deal with dangerous dogs but does not keep a list.

Pendleton police from 2014-16 responded to 2,248 dog complaints. Roberts said reports about dogs biting people in Pendleton is a monthly occurrence.

Pendleton officer Cass Clark shot a dog in May after it latched onto his arm. Roberts said the dog survived the wound. The U.S. Postal Service in June moved mailboxes on the North Hill due to two dangerous dogs in the neighborhood. Roberts said the volume of animal complaints is one reason why the city is trying to hire an additional part-time code enforcement officer.

## PAVILION: Work on parking portion of project will begin this fall

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to provide, a requirement that Mark Morgan, assistant city manager, said has created barriers to new development.

Morgan said the city already owned a small triangle of land across from the police station to build a planned skate park, but it would be small with no parking. The rest of the land along the railroad tracks between Orchard Avenue and the Hermiston School District maintenance shed is leased by Mitco Investments from Union Pacific Railroad. When Mitco gives up the lease to the city, it will allow for a larger skate park as well as parking and landscaping along the entire stretch.

One of the city's community enhancement goals was making the area along the railroad tracks more visually appealing. The agreement between Mitco and the city also requires Mitco to landscape the parcel that will contain the Maxwell Marketplace, and requires an 8-foot right of way through the property to be main-

tained for a future extension of Hermiston's trail system.

The \$220,000 will come from the community enhancement reserve fund, Hermiston Urban Renewal Agency and transient room tax.

Myers said Hermiston's origins as two separate cities on either side of the railroad tracks created a gap through the middle of town, but in recent years he has worked to close that gap. Myers owns Nookie's Restaurant and Hermiston Brewing Company next to the tracks, sold land to build the Holiday Inn Express and recently opened the Maxwell Siding Event Center. The Maxwell Marketplace will be the latest project that Myers said will help tie both sides of downtown together and bring more people and business to the downtown district.

"I think the future is bright for downtown," he said.

Work on the parking portion of the project will begin this fall, with a groundbreaking for the pavilion in the spring and a goal for completion by June 1.