Seattle highway shutdown spawns hashtags, dread

Officials predict most painful traffic in city's history

> By LISA BAUMANN Associated Press

SEATTLE — A major thoroughfare for commuters along downtown Seattle's waterfront is set to shut down for good Friday, ushering in what officials say will be one of the most painful traffic periods in the history of the booming Pacific Northwest city.

The aging, double-decker, 2.2-mile Alaskan Way Viaduct, which carries about 90,000 vehicles each day, will be replaced by a four-lane tunnel. Officials say tearing down the viaduct, damaged in a 2001 earthquake, will allow Seattle to reimagine its waterfront with new parks, paths and other amenities.

But the new tunnel won't open until about three weeks after the viaduct closes as workers realign the highway into it. A mélange of other construction projects will further constrain traffic in the hilly city surrounded by water, already known for its population growth and traffic woes.

Washington's transportation agency on its website has a clock counting down to



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson

In this photo taken Thursday, Jan. 3, rush hour northbound Highway 99 traffic backs-up while heading toward the Alaskan Way Viaduct just ahead as a sign overhead advises of an upcoming closure of the roadway in Seattle.

the viaduct closure, which it says will be the longest major highway closure the Puget Sound region has ever seen.

The period between the viaduct's closure, scheduled for 10 p.m. Friday, and the state Route 99 tunnel opening is already being dubbed the 'Seattle Squeeze.'

"It is dramatic," said Heather Marx, director of Downtown Mobility for the Seattle Department of Transportation. "Everyone traveling in the region will be impacted," she said, referring to people going to and through the Seattle metropolitan area.

City, King County and state officials have been doing outreach and working to ensure things run as smoothly as possible, like authorities did ahead of Los Angeles' "Carmageddon" freeway shutdown in 2011. Many feared that dayslong bridge project on one of the region's most critical freeways would lead to epic traffic jams, but it cruised to a finish ahead of schedule with

MONDAY

Chilly with clouds

ALMANAC

HIGH

67° (1990) -18° (1909)

0.26

Fri.

NNE 4-8

7:35 a.m.

4:31 p.m. 10:17 a.m.

9:12 p.m.

New

NE 4-8

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.

HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.

Today

WSW 3-6

SSW 6-12

Last

HIGH

TEMP.

Normals

TEMP.

Normals

PRECIPITATION

Month to date

Last year to date

Normal year to date

PRECIPITATION

Month to date

Year to date

Boardman

Pendleton

Sunrise today

First

Sunset toniaht

Moonrise today

Last year to date

Normal year to date WINDS (in mph)

SUN AND MOON

Full

24 hours ending 3 p.m

Normal month to date

24 hours ending 3 p.m

Normal month to date

no significant problems.

During the Squeeze," school bus drivers will start their days earlier, and officials are advising commuters to work from home or adjust their work hours if they can. Those who can't are being asked to walk, bike, join a carpool or use transit including buses, light rail or water taxis — all to avoid driving solo into downtown during peak commute times.

Tad Donaghe, of West Seattle, usually travels by bus

to his downtown job at Nordstrom but has worked out an alternate route involving light rail and water taxi to avoid the anticipated crush of drivers switching to buses during the closure.

"I tried out my #Viadoom commute tonight," he tweeted Monday, using a popular hashtag related to the

Donaghe told The Associated Press that route was relatively "lovely." And although the new commute will cost more and may take longer than the 80 minutes it lasted Monday, his employer pays for his transit so he doesn't

"No matter what, it was infinitely nicer than if I had driven home," Donaghe said. "I quit driving for a commute because mass transit is infinitely less stressful."

The growth of tech giant Amazon and a population boom has spawned an abundance of construction in the Seattle area in recent years with new housing, light rail expansion and infrastructure development already straining commuters' patience. Once the tunnel opens, removing the viaduct will take months, which will be followed by the creation of the new downtown waterfront area. Large private projects also in the city's core include the renovation of a sports arena that will host professional hockey and an addition to the Washington State Convention Center.

"We've added 85,000 new people to the county in just the last two years, so these are the kinds of public spaces and destinations and mobility we need to support our growing region," Meghan Shepard, with Seattle's Transportation Department, said in a city

video posted on YouTube. Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan recently announced legislation that would complete funding of the new waterfront area, includes 20 acres of public spaces and an elevated pathway connecting the waterfront to the historic Pike Place Market and downtown.

"After the many years of tunnel construction, the viaduct will finally be coming down, and work on the waterfront of the future will begin," Durkan said in a statement.

The viaduct was built in 1953 and weakened in the earthquake. While it was repaired and strengthened, the aging roadway remained vulnerable to earthquakes. City and state officials and others battled for years over how best to replace it, with the tunnel plan, now estimated at \$3.3 billion, chosen by former Gov. Chris Gregoire and state lawmakers

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TEMPERATURE FORE **42°** 27 **40°** 26° 26° **52°** 27 **31°**

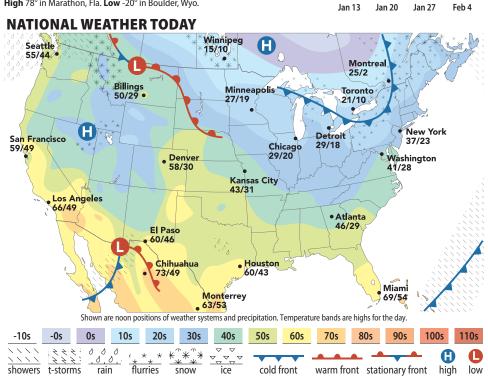
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NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 78° in Marathon, Fla. Low -20° in Boulder, Wyo.



Audit finds racial disparity in outcomes at Portland schools

PORTLAND (AP) — There was an achievement gap of more than 50 percent between white students and black students in Oregon's largest school district, Portland Public Schools, according to an audit released Wednesday by the state Secretary of State's office found.

The yearlong audit also similar achievement discrepancies for Hispanic, Native American and low-income students. The report blamed the results on the fact that schools with the most vulnerable students faced chronic turnover among principals and teachers; that the district doesn't monitor its spending on programs to help those students closely enough and that it spends more on support services such as administration, substitute teachers, benefits and school buses than it does on instruction.

Teachers in the district's high-poverty schools were absent an average of one-month out of a ninemonth school year and most absences fell on Fridays

and Mondays. Not all of the teachers are always replaced by substitutes, leading to uneven instruction, the audit found

The audit found an achievement gap between white and black students of 53 percent, versus a statewide average discrepancy of 29 percent. Nineteen percent of black third-graders met or exceeded the standard in Portland schools and 34 percent of Hispanic third-graders did so.

"Portland Public Schools has more funding per student than all Oregon peer districts and more than many national peer districts, yet management challenges and an inconsistent focus on performance are hurting students and teachers, Secretary of State Dennis Richardson said in announcing the findings

The report also flagged excessive spending retirement parties and gifts, including \$13,000 to rent a Portland Spirit river cruise ship and money spent on crystal retirement gifts and leis shipped from Hawaii.

Portland Superintendent Guadalupe Guerrero told reporters it's important to provide extra training, support, and pay to principals and teams of strong teachers at high-needs schools so they will stick around.

"This is going to take some work. But it's work we've already embarked on," he told The Oregonian/ OregonLive.

Guerrero said he had 'begun the conversation' with the teachers union.

Leaders of that union refused to speak with state auditors.

School board member Julia Brim-Edwards and board chair Rita Moore both took issue with the state's audit, contending it gives an outdated picture of their district, the newspaper said. Guerrero's arrival and their election to the school board are part of a change in direction, they said.

Meanwhile, Portland schools compare favorably to other districts both in and out of the state when it comes to white students who aren't low-income.

Remains ID'd as girl in SUV that went over cliff

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) Human remains found on a Northern California beach belong to one of the six adopted children killed along with their parents when their mother intentionally drove their SUV off a cliff, authorities said Wednesday.

The Mendocino County sheriff's department had trouble identifying the human remains found shortly after the March 26 crash until the biological mother of Hannah Hart, 16, called the department from Mobile, Alabama, in October. She was responding to a request from investigators for family members to come forward and help with the identification process.

The woman's DNA sample matched the teen's remains, the sheriff's department said.

Only the remains of 15-year-old Devonte Hart have not been found. Nonetheless, the sheriff's department says it believes all six children died in the crash. Devonte, who was black, drew national attention after he was photographed in tears while hugging a white police officer at a 2014 protest.

The sheriff's department said Jennifer Hart, 38, was drunk when she intentionally drove her vehicle off California's scenic Highway 1 and over a cliff into the ocean about 155 miles north of San Francisco. Investigators are still trying to determine a motive.

Toxicology results showed that Hart's wife Sarah Hart, 38, and several of the children ages 12 through 19 had large amounts of a drug that can cause drowsiness in their systems.

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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