

Roadwork season begins

ODOT hopes to ease traffic problems on Highway 18 this summer

By Ron Karten

Smoke Signals staff writer

Highway 18, the main route to Grand Ronde and Spirit Mountain Casino, will undergo a major face-lift this summer and next.

The state Department of Transportation is calling one of this summer's biggest restoration projects the "megapave," during which almost 14 miles of Highway 18 will be repaved.

The repaving project started last summer at Highway 101 on the Oregon coast and ended at Valley Junction east of Grand Ronde. This summer's repaving work will reach all the way to Oldsville Road west of McMinnville.

Paving will be done from mile post 27 near Willamina, past Sheridan, to mile post 40.34 at Oldsville Road. Cones are already deployed on Highway 18 to prepare shoulders and guard rails before paving starts.

Also occurring this summer will be a project that will totally remake the section of highway between Willamina and Fort Hill.

The Fort Hill Road to Wallace Bridge project is a \$15 million investment that intends to bring Highway 18 up to rural expressway standards by widening the road and consolidating access points.

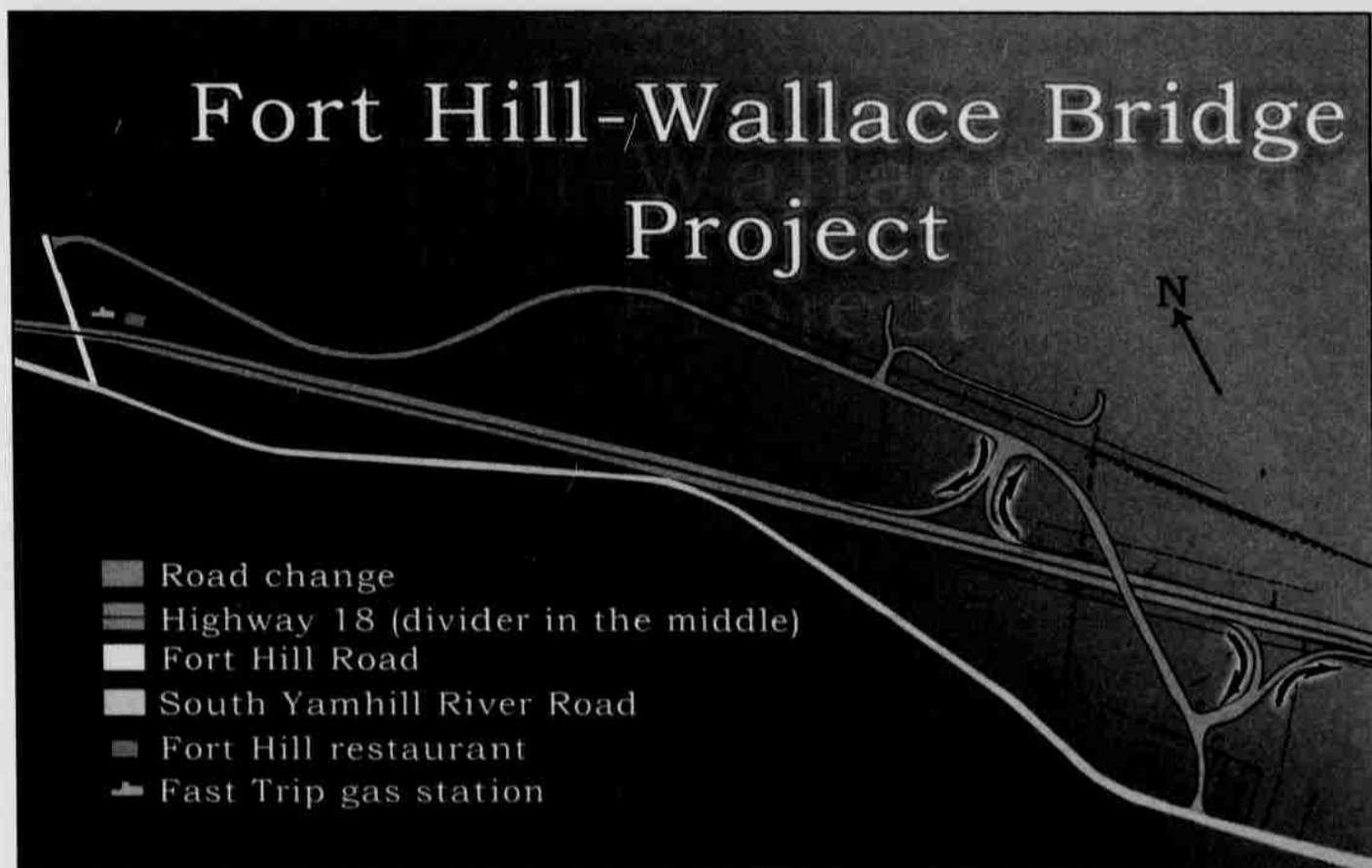
A new interchange east of Fort Hill will replace the existing intersection of the highway with Fort Hill Road (to the north) and Yamhill River Road (to the south). A new frontage road will be constructed on the north side of the highway to connect the interchange with Fort Hill Road to provide access to local residences, the Fort Hill restaurant and gas station and Cascade Structural Laminators, formerly Fort Hill Lumber.

Turns near the Fort Hill Road intersection were responsible for nine accidents in 2006, the most recent year for which ODOT has numbers. This is a notorious bottleneck for drivers familiar with Grand Ronde as traffic slows to allow cars and pedestrians to exit or enter the highway.

ODOT placed the Fort Hill intersection among the top 5 percent of dangerous roadways in the state. More than 19,000 vehicles pass through the intersection daily.

The Fort Hill Road to Wallace Bridge project will:

- ◆ Widen the existing three-lane roadway to include four travel lanes with a concrete barrier in the median;
- ◆ Construct a frontage road behind the Fort Hill restaurant and service station that connects to the new interchange;
- ◆ Construct a new interchange about three-quarters of a mile east of Fort Hill Road to replace the existing Fort Hill Road/South Yamhill River Road intersection;
- ◆ Close or relocate some driveways to reduce the number of direct access points to the highway and to improve safety;



Map created by George Valdez

◆ Add acceleration lanes.

Achieving a safer intersection, said Adam Torgerson, Public Information Officer for ODOT's Region 2 North, means eliminating left turns across traffic.

ODOT built shoulder and median rumble strips on this section of the highway back in 2000, and though the project decreased the number of accidents for a time, continued increases in traffic and speed have pushed the accident numbers back up, Torgerson said.

Trucks with gravel for both projects will be rumbling into and out of a staging point at the Old Mill in Grand Ronde, four-tenths of a mile west of Grand Ronde Road on the north side of the road.

The construction schedule is going to leave the area with a single lane in each direction for much of the summer, and a single lane for both directions on weeknights when the traffic is lowest.

"For both projects, workers will flag single lane traffic only at night, excluding Fridays, Saturdays and holidays when the travel lanes will remain open around the clock," Torgerson said. "Though there may be ongoing work during the day, it will be such that it does not close any lanes with the exception of a passing lane."

McMinnville-based Oregon Mainline Paving LLC was awarded through a competitive bid process both Oregon 18 projects.

The Fort Hill to Wallace Bridge project will be completed in 2009.

Oregon 22, Sourgrass Creek (Indian Bridge), a third ODOT project in the area, is another general maintenance project to be completed this summer.

Located at mile post 12.5 between Dolph Junction and Grand Ronde on Three Rivers Highway, also known as Oregon 22, and Hebo Road, Sour-

grass Creek Bridge was constructed in 2007, replacing an old culvert to improve fish passage.

Most of the work will take place off the road where drainage and bridge support work are still needed, according to Project Manager Shane Ottosen. Part of the time, one lane will be used for truck delivery access, he said.

It is not expected to have as sig-

nificant an effect on either coastal or casino traffic as the two Highway 18 projects.

With a \$2.1 million price tag, Sourgrass Creek Bridge project is expected to be completed in three to five weeks this summer, from July 5 into August.

Gresham-based M. J. Hughes Construction Inc. is the contractor. ■

Governor visiting Grand Ronde on Memorial Day

Kulongoski's name to be added to Veterans' Memorial

By Dean Rhodes

Smoke Signals editor

Gov. Ted Kulongoski will make a return trip to Grand Ronde on Memorial Day, May 26, and he will leave behind something after he returns to Salem.

His name. During a 3 p.m. ceremony at the Grand Ronde Veterans' Memorial, the names of more than 40 local war veterans will be added to the memorial, as well as Kulongoski's.

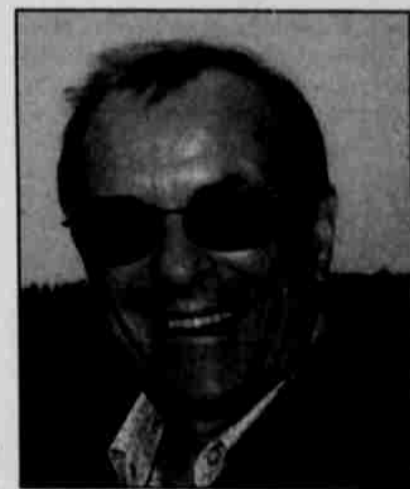
Kulongoski, 67, grew up in St. Louis, Mo., and after graduating from high school he enlisted in the Marine Corps and served in Southeast Asia.

Kulongoski's appearance will be the culmination of Memorial Day events in Grand Ronde, which start at 8 a.m. when the Tribal Honor Guard, Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 4211, the Northwest Indian Veterans' Association, AMVETS Post 2000 and American Legion Post 75 conduct services at Grand Ronde Cemetery on Grand Ronde Road.

At 3 p.m., the same veterans' groups will conduct services at the Grand Ronde Veterans' Memorial and add the names of local war veterans to the memorial.

Kulongoski will be the keynote speaker.

For more information, call Carl Lambert at 503-879-4222 or Gene LaBonte at 503-879-5342. ■



Gov. Ted Kulongoski