

Highway from A1

death of cyclist Jane Higdon on May 31, 2006.

"When I've talked to people about constructing next summer, some people get moved to tears," Taylor said. "They can't believe it. They're so excited. And they knew Jane Higdon or they bicycle and they've been terrified."

Oregon State Police reported at the time that Higdon was biking behind three other cyclists when the second cyclist in line crashed.

According to the police report account:

At the same time, the approaching southbound 2004 Kenworth truck and pole trailer, driven by John McWhorter, 31, of Winston, was slowing down and moving over to pass the bicyclists.

To avoid the other bicyclist who had gone down, Higdon moved into the southbound lane. McWhorter then moved toward the northbound lane in an attempt to avoid Higdon, but the right side of the truck struck her.

Because of the road's "geometric condition," the truck driver was found not to be at fault and no citation was issued. None of the other three bicyclists were injured.

In the years following the tragedy, efforts to address the highway's dangers were slow going, partly due to jurisdictional con-

trol resting with the state. From the state's viewpoint, Taylor said, Territorial is low on the list of priorities.

"There are so many facilities that, from a crash data perspective or from a resource perspective, it just wasn't getting attention," she said.

In 2014, Lane County applied for and successfully secured \$440,000 from the Transportation Community and System Preservation Program for a planning process to involve the community in finding a design solution.

"We had public workshops at King Estate and Lorane Grange," Taylor said, "and that's where we looked at current roadway alignment and what the community would prefer."

County officials interviewed stakeholders including bicycle riding groups, freight companies, local land holders and area residents. Community input from these meetings indicated a desire to protect the natural environment and preserve the rural character of the roadway while softening sharp curves and widening the shoulders.

Meanwhile, Lane County worked to acquire additional funding in order to deliver the community-preferred design and more than 100 interested parties were kept updated periodically over the years on the status of the project.

The conclusions of the planning process were documented in the county's

2016 Technical Report, though at the time funding for the project was still in question.

"Back when we were planning this, we had no idea where the funding would come from," Taylor said.

A major turning point came in 2017 with the passage of Keep Oregon Moving, Oregon's landmark transportation package (HB 1717). Included in the bill was a provision to transfer the 42-mile stretch of Territorial Highway within Lane County from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to county jurisdiction.

A one-time payment of \$2.3 million needed for improvements and maintenance was also allocated and the state is to provide a total of \$30 million over the next five years.

Taylor said this was exactly the kind move the highway project needed.

"The thought was that, as a feature that's running from county line to county line, if it was under county jurisdiction, we would take better care of it," she said. "Lane County recently got jurisdiction in March of the entire highway, from the north county line to the south county line."

Taylor also pointed out that Higdon happened to be friends with state Sen. Floyd Prozanski, "and he was very instrumental in elevating this as a priority and getting the jurisdic-

tional transfer from the state," she said.

Transfer of some maintenance responsibilities will also be shifted to the county in three phases over five years as ODOT has committed to repairing bridges and bringing sections of the road in Veneta up to code in line with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Despite the funding and jurisdictional shift, the condition of the highway makes improvement plans a costly undertaking that the county cannot completely afford.

"The amount of funding that we got is not enough to bring all of the highway into good condition," said Taylor, "but we are going to be prioritizing maintenance and safety."

Even so, with improvement plans and a feasibility study completed, the county is moving ahead with an informational meeting June 20 for public review and comments.

As they currently stand, plans are to initiate improvements in four phases, which will take place over four summer projects.

Phase 1 will begin in 2020 at a midway section of the highway, which addresses a landslide hazard at Stony Point and realignment of the section's particularly sharp curves.

Phase 2 construction will address the northern part of the corridor at Gillespie Corners in 2021. The curves of the road there

will also be softened and two bridges will be raised and widened.

Phase 3's 2022 construction will realign the corners of a segment between Easy Acres Drive and Hamm Road.

Phase 4 will complete construction in 2023 on the corridor's southern half between Territorial Lane and Cottage Grove-Lorane Road, implementing improvements the latter's intersection and more softening of curves along the roadway.

Each phase will also widen the road to include six-foot shoulders and 11-foot vehicle lanes, keeping just one vehicle travel lane in each direction. Between the widening and realignment of curves, it is hoped road access and sight distance for all traffic will be greatly improved.

The possibility of building temporary access roads going around construction has been floated.

"We're going to do our best to minimize delays and we're still working through those details," Taylor said.

Follow-up community meetings and targeted public outreach before each phase of construction are also planned to better assess impact.

"Between summers

we'll be working on acquiring right-of-way from property owners and minimizing and mitigating impacts, reconstructing fences, making sure everyone still has their driveway access where we have to move driveways, working on environmental permits where we need to restore wetlands and refining stormwater management plans," Taylor said.

Though no start dates have been decided, Taylor estimated summer work on each phase could take around five months.

Neighbors and community members are invited to an informational meeting to learn more about upcoming improvements on Thursday, June 20, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Lorane Grange (80342 Old Lorane Road).

After an informational summary of the corridor plan, the meeting will break out with staffed tables to answer questions one-on-one with attendees. Each table will have a set of plans and experts to answer specific questions about each phase of construction.

"It's an opportunity for everyone to get together," said Taylor. "We really want to hear from people if they have concerns and work through those."



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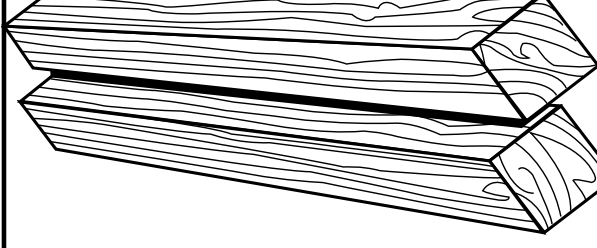


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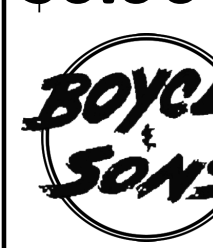
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