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OREGON DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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Construction on the new interchange begins this spring.

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Ten years ago this spring, the North Medford Interchange project broke ground. The $36 million modernization project was designed to make safety and traffic flow improvements to the east side of the Interstate 5 interchange (exit 30) that links I-5 and Oregon Highway 62, which is also known as Crater Lake Highway.

Originally scheduled for completion in October 2005, project delays have pushed the final stages into this spring. “While major work was completed by the end of last October,” said Project Manager Joe Thomas, “there’s still some work that needs to be finished.”

The remaining work is focused on Biddle Road. The contractor, J.W. Fowler of Dallas, Oregon, will finish widening Biddle Road, as well as complete curbs, sidewalks, driveways and landscaping along the road. “We had to wait for better weather so we could go ahead with final paving and striping,” said Public Service Representative Bill Boyett. “We’re hoping to wrap this up as quickly as possible.”

More than four years of planning and development went into the project. When the north Medford interchange was opened in 1962, the surrounding area was undeveloped. Biddle Road and Highway 62 were not grade separated until 1967. The initial construction stages widened the bridges on Biddle Road and Highway 62; removed the Medco Haul Road over crossings; and built new on- and off- ramps for northbound I-5 traffic. Poplar Drive was reconstructed and a new, signalized intersection was installed for both Fred Meyer and Poplar Square.

A retaining wall was built for the northbound I-5 off-ramp. During development, members of the Citizens Advisory Committee wanted an aesthetic element added to the interchange since it serves as a gateway to Medford. ODOT brought forth ideas, and with the volunteer services of Carmine Petretto of Jacksonville, a design of salmon, cattails and sugar pine was incorporated into the wall.

You can view the North Medford interchange project via the Oregon Department of Transportation’s travel information web site, Tripcheck.com. One camera shows the northbound I-5 off-ramp and the Highway 62 overpass. The second camera shows the intersection of Crater Lake Highway and Poplar Drive, looking west toward I-5.
South Medford Interchange Project went to bid March 16

On March 16, the $70 million South Medford Interchange project went to bid, after more than seven years of development on the Rogue Valley’s largest state highway project since Interstate 5 was built.

A joint venture with the City of Medford, the project is designed to improve safety and reduce congestion. The centerpiece of the project is construction of a new interchange 1,900 feet south of the existing Barnett Road exit (exit 27). The new interchange design is called a single point urban interchange (SPUI), which handles large volumes of traffic.

The City of Medford is contributing $15 million toward the project.

Peripheral construction work began in February with tree and brush removal. Nearly 200 trees and brush near the Bear Creek bridges on I-5 needed to be removed before interchange construction could begin.

“The tree and brush removal was started before birds can nest for the season,” said Technical Services Manager Joe Squire. “Some of the trees, such as Cottonwood and Ash, will be used for wildlife habitat in the Rogue Valley and site restoration once the interchange is complete.”

The SPUI is located close to Bear Creek, so additional bridges are needed to accommodate the interchange.

Not surprisingly, the population growth in the Medford area was unforeseen when the interchange was built in 1963.

“This is quite simply the largest project many of us have ever worked on,” said Area Manager Art Anderson. “The plan sheets alone for this project are about 800 pages.”

A project Solution Team and Citizens Advisory Committee worked through more than 20 different concepts to develop the best design. The Highland Alternative was identified as the preferred alternative.

“The development process took a lot of time but we needed that time to make sure we got it right,” said Project Leader Debbie Timms. “A project like this changes Medford and the surrounding area just like construction of the interstate did back in the 1960s.”

According to Project Information Specialist Gary Leaming, a video is available on the project web site, www.smedfordinterchange.org, which shows how the SPUI operates.

“We want the public to know as much as possible about the new design,” Leaming said.
This is a view of the south Medford interchange (exit 27) from September 1966, more than four years after Interstate 5 opened to traffic. Both the interstate overpass and the Barnett Road Bridge over Bear Creek were two-lane structures. At the time, much of south Medford was still open country with orchards. The Rogue Valley Manor sits atop Barneburg Hill. The Jackson County Fairgrounds sit at the current location of Fred Meyer and Hometown Buffet.

For more information on the South Medford Interchange project, and to view other historical photos, go to the project home page at www.smedfordinterchange.org.
After nearly two years of intense work, the public teams developing the future Fern Valley Interchange in Phoenix narrowed their designs into two concepts and went out for public input. They had no trouble finding some.

“We understand the business owner’s concerns,” said Area Manager Art Anderson. “Similar concerns were voiced in Jacksonville and Grants Pass when state highway projects appeared on the horizon.

“We welcome the feedback and suggestions. ODOT projects in Jacksonville and Grants Pass received national awards in part because of our strong partnerships with the local business communities.”

Groups of local stakeholders — a Citizens Advisory Committee and a Project Development Team — have met regularly since March 2004 to develop conceptual alternatives for the Interstate 5 interchange (exit 24). An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be used to formulate project alternatives and reach a preferred alternative. Construction is scheduled to start in 2008.

The EA is a federal document that is prepared for a project where the significance of the social, economic and environmental impacts is not clearly established.

“We’ve heard from many stakeholders, including the Phoenix Association of Business and Property owners,” said Project Leader Debbie Timms. “We saw the need for a separate meeting just for the local business community.”

ODOT held the second event on March 1 to provide a general project overview.

“The project goal is to address the needs of Phoenix as well as the needs of people traveling to Medford for jobs, for shopping and for other services,” Timms said. “We’re a long way off from construction. Now is the time for stakeholders to help us develop the final design.”

According to Timms, information is also available on the project web site: www.oregon.gov/odot/hwy/region3.

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“This project development process is both collaborative and transparent. Of course, the process takes years to complete. That’s why it’s so important we maintain open communication with all stakeholders.”

Some 20 different designs from the public, the Citizens Advisory Committee and Project Development Teams have been forwarded into two concepts for further detail and refinement by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

“We’ll further refine these two alternatives and see how they will interconnect with the nearby roadways and communities and neighborhoods,” said Timms. “Once we do that, we’ll take them back to the teams for their review and approval before taking them into the environmental document.”

That document is a federally-required Environmental Assessment. The EA will study the alternatives as to their impact on the human and natural environment. That will be the basis for design of the new interchange that serves Phoenix and the nearby region.

The first concept provides for a Single Point Urban Interchange, making North Phoenix Road a “through movement” northbound from I-5. Neighborhood residents to the east would use that roadway and, on a separate road, connect to their neighborhoods. Truck traffic to Petro truck stop would also use this, but would use Fern Valley Road exclusively.

On the west side, the connection to Oregon Highway 99 would be at Boltz Road. Refinements on the access to Luman Road, the Shoppes retail center at Exit 24, and driveways around the new Highway 99/Boltz Road interchange will require additional studies.

The second concept is similar to the previous alternative but, on the east side of the freeway, Fern Valley Road would be the main road, as it is now. Both neighborhood residents and truck traffic would use Fern Valley. North Phoenix road would be on a new alignment, north of the existing North Phoenix/Fern Valley intersection.

Or, the project teams could mix and match components from each concept to come up with a hybrid.

“That way we get the best interchange for the community, the region and the interstate user,” said Timms.

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Repairs are underway on more than $3 million of winter storm damage to drainage systems along a five-mile stretch of Interstate 5 near the Siskiyou Summit.

Winter storms dumped record levels of rainfall from late December 2005 through January 2006, causing significant damage throughout the Rogue Valley.

The combination of flash floods and four landslides on December 30 closed I-5 for a 16-hour period during peak holiday traffic. While lanes were reopened the following morning to move traffic, it became clear repairs would take weeks if not months.

ODOT maintenance crews focused on pushing debris, including mud, trees and rocks, off the travel lanes to reopen I-5. Dump trucks were later used to haul the material off the shoulders.

“Our crews worked around the clock clearing debris off the highway so that we could get the lanes reopened for people,” said District Manager John Vial. “Most all our crews worked straight through the holidays and weekends without a break.”

The sheer volume and speed at which the material rushed down the mountain shredded the system of pipes, culverts, channels and inlets that provide drainage during the winter season. From milepost eight to 13, the broken pavement looked like peanut brittle.

“I’ve never seen anything like it,” said Vial. “It’s as if someone had taken a large ice cream scoop and worked over the mountain.”

According to Vial, highway shoulders around the region were damaged by the storm, leaving vertical drops at the end of the pavement. On the Siskiyou Summit, the drop off is as deep as 6 feet off the shoulder.

ODOT made a request for federal transportation money to help cover the repair costs for storm-damaged highways.

“We'll be working all summer to repair the damage,” Vial said. “We've still got a couple months of rain ahead of us, but we're hoping the worst is behind us.”
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SEVEN OAKS INTERCHANGE

Construction is scheduled to begin later this spring on the Seven Oaks Interchange at Interstate 5 exit 35, north of Central Point.

The bridge is being replaced because it is structurally deficient due to cracking. The new structure will be widened to accommodate three lanes on I-5 as well as improve the alignment for safety.

In addition to providing a new bridge, the project also modifies the southbound off ramp. The configuration of the new southbound off ramp allows traffic to go under the overpass and loop back toward Rogue Valley Highway (Oregon Highway 140), where the connection will be signalized. Motorists bound for White City and Highway 140 would then turn right.

As part of the $24 million project, the two existing I-5 bridges over the Central Oregon and Pacific Railroad will also be replaced.

With few exceptions, four lanes of traffic on I-5 will be maintained during the project.

HIGHWAY 62 CORRIDOR

The Highway 62 Corridor team are still working toward submitting concepts for the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Highway 62 corridor from Medford to White City experiences heavy traffic and congestion. The volume of traffic in the corridor is similar to that found on Interstate 5 north of Medford.

Safety is another concern on the corridor. Crash rates from Poplar Drive to Delta Waters Road and from Corry Road to Antelope Road exceed the statewide rate, primarily because of the volume of traffic and roadways located between those points.

To date, the teams have worked through many concepts with four currently under review. The concepts can be reviewed at the project web site at www.oregon.gov/odot/hwy/region3.

I-5: NORTH ASHLAND-SOUTH MEDFORD

Motorists should expect delays during peak travel times until Memorial Day as rehabilitation is underway on four Interstate 5 bridges from Phoenix to Talent. Significant delays occur during peak travel times, the morning and evening commutes, because traffic is narrowed to one lane in each direction.

“We’re going to get the work finished prior to the summer travel season,” said Project Manager Tim Fletcher.

Work includes modifying the bridge rail to current safety standards and building a new concrete deck. The work is part of the $12.4 million South Medford-North Ashland interstate paving project, which began last year.

For Spring Break, all lanes of traffic are scheduled to be open during the week of March 27.

Motorists should plan ahead, leave extra time for their commute and consider using alternate routes.

In addition to the bridge work, the contractor, LTM Inc., will also finish the final layer, or “1%” of asphalt on the interstate that didn’t get completed last fall. This includes all of the southbound lanes and part of the northbound lane, near mile post 23. The paving work will be done at night.

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The Oregon Department of Transportation has received 103 applications for funds from the ConnectOregon program, Governor Kulongoski’s $100 million lottery bond-backed initiative passed by the 2005 Legislature. Applicants requested a total of $237 million for a variety of projects including air freight, business aviation, passenger air, marine, rail freight, bus and/or rail transit, and multiple mode projects.

“I’m pleased the applications represented every corner of the state and all the different modes of transportation,” said Governor Ted Kulongoski. “It’s clear there’s a need to invest in rail, air, marine and transit throughout the state so that we can improve the flow of commerce, people and goods — which will strengthen our communities and our economy.”

ODOT Director Matt Garrett echoed Gov. Kulongoski’s sentiments. “I’m delighted that we have such a wide variety of projects,” he said. “There are projects from both the public and private sectors, all of which could result in successful public-private partnering. Also, many applicants are providing well over the required 20 percent match amount, and I think that indicates their confidence and enthusiasm for making these strategic investments in Oregon.”

Thirteen applications were received for southwest Oregon. Local applications include a $4.2 million request from Medford Urban Renewal and Rogue Valley Transit District for a Medford Intermodal Transit Center and a $4.7 million request from the Rogue Valley International Medford Airport for a Multi-Modal Airport Improvement Project.

Over the next few weeks, the applications will be screened for completeness and technical feasibility. They will then be reviewed by four advisory committees (air, rail, freight and public transit) and the Area Commissions on Transportation to ensure a wide and comprehensive discussion of which projects to recommend to the Oregon Transportation Commission.

Applications will be evaluated on specific considerations as defined in the legislation (SB70):

- Whether the project reduces transportation costs for Oregon businesses;
- Whether it benefits or connects two or more modes;
- Whether it is a critical link in a statewide or regional transportation system;
- How much of the cost can be borne by applicants;
- Whether the project creates construction and permanent jobs in the state; and
- Whether the project is ready for construction.

Projects eligible for funding from the Oregon State Highway Fund, e.g. use fuel taxes and motor vehicle taxes, are not eligible for ConnectOregon funding.

“It will be difficult to select the best projects given so many qualified and beneficial applications,” said Oregon Transportation Commission Chair Stuart Foster. “We’ll look forward to gathering input from around the state.”

The OTC is scheduled to make its final project selection this summer. Status updates and a table showing the breakdown of project requests can be found on the ODOT website, www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/CO/index.shtml.
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