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## Nibbling away at Insley Street

"Big Pipe" coming

BY ERIC NORBERG

The Bee Dec 17, 2006

**The Eastside Big Pipe underground sewage tunnel project is well underway in the Central Southeast, with excavations near OMSI and the former location of Corno's Market on S.E. MLK Boulevard.**



ERIC NORBERG / THE BEE

Workers from Northwest Natural Gas dig to relocate their pipes away from the center of the intersection of S.E. 18th and Insley, where two major excavations are in store in the next half decade to complete the Big Pipe sewer tunnel project. BES is also relocating sewer lines there. The massive public works project is intended to prevent sewage from overflowing to the Willamette River every time rain falls.

These large excavations are intended to provide subterranean access for the giant tunnel boring machines which by next May will be getting to work on the 22-foot-wide sewage tunnel deep below the streets of Southeast Portland; a similar, final, 50-foot-wide hole will be dug further south, on the northwest corner of S.E. McLoughlin Boulevard and 18th in the Brooklyn neighborhood.

But that hole will not quite be the south end of the huge project; a smaller but still substantial tunnel will be dug by a boring machine from that hole southward, under McLoughlin and one block of 18th, to the intersection of S.E. 18th and Insley, at the north end of Westmoreland. This southernmost tunnel will connect the Big Pipe Project with the deep "Insley Collector" shaft which for a century or more has aggregated all sewage from areas south to send north for treatment, and which now spills to the Willamette River via Outfall #28 off Oaks Bottom in times of rain.

At that intersection, one more large hole will be dug, blocking the

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intersection, on two separate occasions. The first time, it will be to serve as a target and exit point for the smaller boring machine as it completes its tunnel. At that time the new shaft will not be connected.

The intersection will then be filled up, repaved, and restored to service for a few years till the rest of the Big Pipe is completed from

McLoughlin Boulevard north to the Swan Island pumping station. When that's done, then the Insley-18th intersection will again be dug up, and the newly bored shaft will be connected to the "Insley Collector" shaft -- and its outfall to the Willamette River will be sealed off permanently.

In preparation for the first excavation of this Westmoreland intersection, various public utilities have been rerouting their service around the spot. First, the Portland Water Bureau rerouted water service between Reedway and Insley along S.E. 20th, to preserve water service for those located east of the intersection. Then PGE rerouted some electric service for residents near the intersection onto two new poles north from S.E. Harold Street, instead of via poles on Insley.

As November ended, workers from Northwest Natural Gas had arrived to do extensive relocation of their supply pipes within a hundred feet of the intersection in all directions.

When the water relocation on S.E. 20th between Insley and Harold was completed, the contractor repaired that unfinished street, laying down enough asphalt to respond to the extensive pothole problem there.

This was apparently part of the city's solution for the two industrial lighting businesses on the block on Insley and McLoughlin, between 18th and 20th, who have relied on sending their trucks west on Insley to 17th in order to access McLoughlin Boulevard northbound. With Insley to be blocked by the excavations at 18th, the trucks would have to drive south on 20th to Harold, then turn left to access northbound McLoughlin at the Harold Street stoplight.

Paving 20th became essential to avoid damage to the trucks and the complete destruction of the street surface. Whether the new asphalt is to be the final paving for that block is unclear, but the street is certainly improved. However, the new asphalt surface does not completely cover all potholes, and seems unlikely to endure the commercial truck traffic for the years the project will be in progress, so further paving there may be necessary.

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