



The Oregonian

Eastside Big Pipe tunneler puts sloppy start behind it

Sewer - The underground machine puts 260 feet between it and an early flood

Wednesday, August 01, 2007

SPENCER HEINZ

The Oregonian

After a rough start because of flooding in its starting-point shaft, Portland's eastside Big Pipe tunneling machine has smoothly completed some three weeks of digging and come to a planned monthlong stop.

From there, workers will stage the rest of its four-year dig -- the final leg of a two-decade mission to stop most overflows of rain-driven storm water and sewage into the Willamette River.

"This is a planned shutdown until about Labor Day, and then they'll be under full-production mode, and we'll get a better idea of how many feet the machine can do in a day," Paul Gribbon, the city's Big Pipe tunneling manager, said Tuesday.

The good news follows a slow start. On June 13 -- nine days into the planned four-year run along a six-mile route beneath the east bank of the Willamette River -- workers shut down the machine because of groundwater flooding through a failed gasket at the base of its starting-point shaft. The shaft amounts to an 11-story-deep concrete-walled cylinder with an open top roughly the diameter of a softball diamond. The shaft is near the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry on the river's east bank.

On July 5, tunneling resumed. As of Monday's planned shutdown, the machine had tunneled 260 feet from the shaft. That leaves enough room to connect more than 200 feet of trailing gear. When that's done, full-scale tunneling begins.

Part of a long-range program to improve Portland's system of combined sewers and storm-water pipes, the eastside Big Pipe project is Portland's biggest city-paid construction project. Sewer-bill ratepayers cover the costs. The city estimates \$1.4 billion for a finished system, by 2011, of vastly bigger pipelines and storm-water diversion systems along the Columbia Slough and both sides of the Willamette. -- Spencer Heinz

©2007 The Oregonian