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Big Pipe project on east side starts going full-bore

Willamette - After a leaky launch, tunneling to stem overflows into the river picks up pace

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SPENCER HEINZ
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Portland's eastside Big Pipe boring machine has finished gearing up and finally embarked on the full-fledged start of its four-year run along a six-mile route beneath the east bank of the Willamette River.

"They're up and going," Paul Gribbon, the city's Big Pipe tunneling manager, said Monday. He added that the 960-ton subterranean train of gear should average 40 feet a day over the course of the run.

This marks the last leg of a two-decade effort to stop most overflows of rain-driven storm water and sewage into the Willamette River.

It took a while to get equipped. In early June, flooding slowed the boring machine's breakout from its 11-story-deep startup shaft near the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry. Workers stemmed the leaks in the shaft, and from early July to early August, the machine tunneled 260 feet from the shaft's base to a planned one-month layover.

During the past month, workers have connected more than 200 feet of trailing gear, totaling some 500 tons, to the boring machine. In recent days, the machine has started full-ahead on the four-year effort to install the eastside pipeline by 2011.

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

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