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Into The Depths With Rosie

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BY: **Jonah Sandford**

In June of this year **Rosie** , a 1,000-ton, 25-foot wide "**tunnel boring machine** ," started tunneling 115 feet below inner southeast Portland.

After being lowered into an enormous, 67-foot wide shaft near OMSI, Rosie was assembled and started tunneling to the north. Trailing 200 feet of excavating and tunnel wall-creating machinery behind her, **she has traveled 4,200 feet** and is now taking a **short break** just north of Southeast Morrison Street before she soldiers on.

Rosie is part of the $464 million, almost-too-massive-to-believe East Side Big Pipe Project. The tunnel the machine is slowly creating is designed to **intercept sewage and stormwater** before it reaches the Willamette River and transport it up to a pump station at Swan Island, greatly reducing the number of "**sewage overflows** " in the river that often happen after heavy rains.

This morning, in celebration of Rosie's accomplishments thus far, members of the media were invited to **take a tour** of the project. We strapped on steel toes for our hiking boots, safety glasses and hard hats, and waited to be slowly **lowered down into the abyss** of the "Opera Shaft," Rosie's starting point for her journey.

After an introduction by Commissioner Sam Adams and a brief safety orientation, we were ready to go. As we walked toward the giant hole in the ground it became clear that this was the kind of thing you **dream about working on** when you're a kid. Giant machines and pieces of material everywhere, men and women walking around with walkie-talkies and hard hats, extreme awesomeness all around.

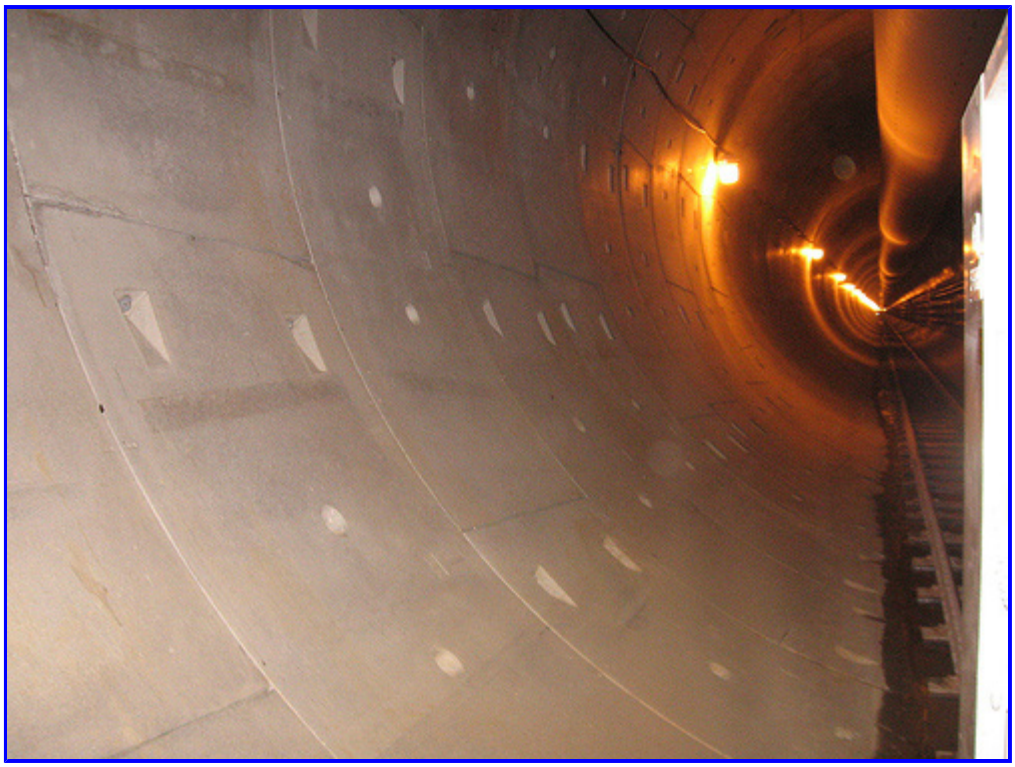
Then, we reached our destination: the Opera Shaft.

As we were lowered down into the depths of the shaft in a small elevator (awesome), it also occurred to me that we were entering an **amazing setting for a horror movie** : A deep hole in the ground with limited ways of escape; a long, mysterious tunnel with a strange machine waiting for us at the end; it was clear we didn't want anything to go wrong.

The Opera Shaft is **one of seven shafts** along the east side, all of which are being prepared to "**accept** " Rosie as she makes her way north (the whole project seems to be tailor-made for snicker-inducing double meanings. Another example: We were told the large crane hovering above us is there to "**service the shaft** ").

The scene at the bottom was pretty amazing. One one side of the shaft was the starting point for our next adventure: hopping on a little train and **retracing Rosie's journey** so far.

Off we went. It took us a few minutes to travel the distance Rosie has gone in the past six months. Rosie **lays a track** as she goes to help haul equipment and supplies back to the opera shaft, and this is what our trolley chugged away on. The walls of the tunnel around us were made in **5-foot segments** , each circular segment consisting of seven pieces of cement.



Here's a picture of one segment waiting to be lowered into the deep.

Finally, we reached Rosie, or rather the tail end of her. We climbed off our trolley and were informed by the tunnel manager that we were right below Le Bistro Montage. There was equipment, tubes and machinery of all different kinds snaking its way from Rosie (again: potentially creepy?), who was resting peacefully. It was amazing.

We chatted with the tunnel manager for a few minutes; he said there are usually crews working down in the tunnel six days a week, 24 hours a day (creepy!!), and that the entire tunnel should be finished sometime in early 2011. We hopped back on

the trolley and headed away from Rosie, **back toward daylight** .

The equivalent project on the west side of the river has already been finished and is in operation. When the eastside project is complete, engineers expect to reduce sewage overflows into the Willamette by 94 percent. I'm not sure if that means we'll all want to spend our weekends splashing around in the river quite yet, but it's definitely an amazing feat, and it will be nice to know those thousands of gallons of sewage and water **have another destination** when it's all finished.

Lets just hope that between now and then **no one gets trapped** in there late at night, with no lights and the elevator broken, with the sounds of a **strange creature** tunneling away in the distance...

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