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A final look at Big Pipe

BY JIM REDDEN
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Rosie the tunnel boring machine finished her work on the east side Big Pipe project late last month. Before the tunnel is sealed off from the surface, Bureau of Environmental Services officials took journalists and guests on a final tour of the six-mile, 22-diameter passageway along the east side of the Willamette River.

CHRISTOPHER ONSTOTT / TRIBUNE PHOTO
Work is almost finished on the long-awaited Big Pipe, which will reduce sewer overflows into the Willamette River. Bureau of Environmental Services officials gave a final tour before the tunnel is closed off.

When completed, the project will greatly reduce combined sewer overflows into the Willamette River. The large new pipes along both sides of the river are the result of an agreement reached between the city and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in 1994. When it rains, the pipes will collect the overflow and move it to the treatment plant on North Columbia Boulevard.

Work began on the project in 1993. Construction of the Columbia Slough portion was completed in 2000, reducing overflows there by 99 percent. The 3.5-mile, 14-foot diameter West Side Big Pipe was completed in 2006.

The East Side Big Pipe tunnel was dug by a boring machine named after the City of Roses. It is 220 feet long, 25 feet in diameter and weighs 530 tons, about the same as 26 TriMet buses.

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