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Hwy. 50 project progressing despite bad weather

By Wendy Schultz | Democrat staff writer

Despite the rain and the cold, progress on the Highway 50 Operational Improvements project continues, and when the weather cooperates, is ready to move into the next phase.

One large piece of the improvements designed to improve traffic flow on Highway 50 has been the bridge on the highway at Placerville Drive.

'This has always been the longest part of the project,' said Bob Erickson, assistant resident Caltrans engineer for the project.

The reconstruction of the bridge was split into thirds, with the middle and eastbound thirds already completed.

'It's dependent upon the weather, but when we can restripe the bridge, we'll be able to shift the lanes to the middle and we can demolish the westbound third and start building the final third of the bridge,' said Erickson. 'It will take about four months to complete the final construction.'

Demolition of the westbound third of the bridge will take place at night over approximately a week and should begin during this final week in February if the rain holds off.

Other construction that may keep downtown residents awake at night during this week is the drilling of the foundations for new signal poles at the intersection of Highway 50 at Spring and Canal streets.

'We're drilling through rock and it's a loud and slow process,' said Erickson.

Widening the bridges at Spring Street, Canal Street and Bedford Avenue is another component of the Highway 50 improvements, but the work cannot begin until after April 15 because the state Department of Fish and Game allows work in creek beds only between April 15 and Oct. 15.

'When we can get into the creek beds, the first order of work will be the widening of the Bedford bridge, then we'll be working on Spring and Canal,' said Erickson.

Concurrent bridge work is not expected due to the logistics of moving traffic through areas with reduced lane access.

The pedestrian overcrossing at Bedford Avenue, an eagerly awaited project piece, is slated to be completed late this summer.

'It was originally the last part of the project, but it will be completed earlier,' said Erickson.

The Highway 50 Operational Improvements Project is slated to be completed in 2009.

Residents and visitors alike have been missing the Christmas trees along Highway 50, but not to worry. The barrier wall and decorative railing for the trees on the south side of the freeway may be completed by the end of March.

'Again, weather dependent, we will finish the barrier wall - almost all the foundation is complete - and hook up the conduit so we can pull the electrical wires,' said Erickson.

The barrier railing footing foundations need to be added and Erickson estimates another two weeks after that to complete the railing.

Caltrans has already received the shipment of lights to go along the railing and they are ready to be placed when construction in the area will not cause damage to them.

'We can work in light rain,' said Erickson, 'so the railing might be finished in March and then we can work on the shoulder.'

Two other greatly awaited events will be the reopening of Forni Road and the opening of West Placerville Drive, the new connector road from Main Street to Placerville Drive.

Forni Road has been closed to through traffic past Fulmer's Auto Body Shop since last summer. In May, motorists should be able to travel down Forni Road and onto West Placerville Drive to eastbound Highway 50.

'The new bridge on the connector road has been paved and once we have an opportunity to install the safety features and to stripe it, we'll be able to open up Forni out to the freeway,' said Erickson.

From Canal Street to West Placerville Drive and west to Forni will remain closed until the contractor has completed drainage work in the parking lots of the businesses in the area and regraded a 100 meter section of the road and PG&E has completed utility work on Main and Forni, possibly in late June.

'We're chomping at the bit to get started and get the roads open,' said Erickson.

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