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Contractor chips away at carpool lanes project

By Noel Stack | Mother Lode News | March 26, 2009 15:27



Chris Ellis, project manager with Nehemiah Construction looks out over workers clearing earth Democrat photos by Krysten Kellum

EL DORADO HILLS - Rock by rock Nehemiah Construction crews continue to clear the path for new Highway 50 carpool lanes on the Bass Lake Grade.

One formidable chunk remains buried in the path toward the bottom and other large rocks sit tight under dirt and grass at the top of the grade. John Kahling, senior civil engineer with the El Dorado County Department of Transportation, said the contractor will chip away as much as possible; blasting might be needed but only on an extremely small scale.

Rock removal is one of many tasks now under way.

Drivers have already notices one big change - a rough ride up and down the grade. Crews recently ground the top layer of asphalt concrete to eliminate the deep-penetrating white lines in the center and on the shoulders. This allows the contractor to stripe and shift traffic where needed.

“On most freeway projects you have to rearrange the lanes to move traffic away from the work zone,” Kahling explained.

Crews can’t just peel off the permanent white stripes and marks because that paint goes about 1 inch deep, he added, and that kind of groove in the roadway is not acceptable, “especially for motorcycles.”

The initial grinding did uncover some problems, according to Kahling. DOT and Nehemiah had to close a westbound lane earlier this month after the grounded roadway began to break up and cars kicked up a lot of debris.

“It was something we took seriously because we didn’t want cars driving on a failing road,” Kahling said.

Contractors did additional grinding on the road and paved over the problem areas to repair it. “We’ve got some other rough spots that we’re going to fix in the next couple of weeks,” Kahling added.

On the west end of the project crews have begun the groundwork needed to replace the Highway 50 bridges over Latrobe Road (El Dorado Hills Boulevard). Shoring is in place to keep the freeway stable while crews dig out the space for new bridge abutments.

One longer bridge will replace the two that now stand there, Kahling said. This will allow crews to widen Latrobe Road under the freeway.

In a month or two crews will have to close some lanes on Latrobe/EDH Boulevard to build the columns needed to support the new bridge, Kahling added. On such a busy road, the engineer said there will be impacts to traffic - more congestion - but they'll do their best to minimize it. It will take several months to build the columns, Kahling added.

Soon drivers will also notice a slight lane shift toward the outside of the freeway, both eastbound and westbound, to give crews a little more room in the center. In addition to breaking up rocks they have also been grading the median to make room for the new lanes.

Though far from done - expected completion in late 2010 - DOT staff has recently been breathing a little easier since the state adopted its budget. Funding for the project comes in the form of \$20 million from the state Corridor Mobility Improvement Account and at one point that money was frozen.

Nehemiah adjusted its workload accordingly in case the funding didn't come through.

Last month the county received a letter from state DOT Director Will Kempton stating that because the Legislature adopted its budget the state would not be forced to suspend projects receiving state funds.

However, El Dorado County DOT Director Jim Ware said there is still "some uncertainty" regarding when the county will get its money because the state has to sell more bonds to raise the cash.

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