

**Archived Story****Posted: Aug 15, 2008 - 10:07:30 PDT****You load 16 tons, and what do you get?**

According to the popular version of the song made famous by "Tennessee" Ernie Ford, you get "...another day older and deeper in debt." While the latter may in fact be true, the Highway 20 realignment project has an aggressive summer goal of moving not just 16 tons but rather 1.6-million cubic yards of dirt and rock.

In an Aug. 4 meeting, ODOT project manager Joe Squire communicated the resumption of work on the Pioneer Mountain to Eddyville highway realignment project began about two weeks later than planned due to higher than anticipated moisture in the soil. Although starting from behind, crews working two, 10-hour shifts on a six-day work week have been gaining ground. With then just six weeks remaining in their weather window for earth-work, confidence was high that the remaining 600,000-plus cubic yards of material would be moved as planned by the Sept. 15 target. An estimated 6-million cubic yards of earth is expected to be moved in total.

In addition to this season's substantial earth movement goal, Yaquina River Constructors have been busy shoring-up several ancient landslide areas, which forced the project to abruptly halt in July of 2007. By installing buttresses along the lower perimeter of the slide-prone sections, engineers determined they could mitigate the hydraulic forces that allow the slope to shift under certain conditions. By digging massive trenches down through and perpendicular to the slip plate, crews install routes for moisture evacuation and then fill the trenches with highly compacted earth. In what might be compared to a channel-key in a shaft/pulley assembly, the buttress serves to lock the land from further down-slope movement.

The summer activities are focused on strategic locations that will place the bridge contractor in a position to perform concrete column and span work throughout the winter, long after the earth movement stage has been abandoned due to coastal precipitation. Already, two hydro-seeding units have been working in areas where slope work is completed for the season and erosion control supplies have been positioned along the route for storm water treatment to minimize environmental impact.

According to Oregon Transportation Commissioner Alan Brown and ODOT managers Vivian Payne and Squire, it may have been at least two decades since ODOT has taken on a project of this scope. Only when seen from a couple of vantage points near the center of the project can one really appreciate, in its raw state, the enormity of the undertaking. Except for the activity taking place on the west terminus of the project, passers-by can see very little of the massive work that is taking place, hidden from view by mountain ridges and timber. Unfortunately, the public will never likely grasp the immense scope of the work being done. Once completed, it will be difficult to fully comprehend the extent of the effort undertaken to realign the highway.

With the additional expense of landslide mitigation, rising oil prices (which negatively affect fuel and asphalt costs) and the escalating price of steel and concrete, we've spun off our own version of Ford's classic, which we hope will inspire ODOT and Yaquina River Constructors to stick with it and hit their revised 2011 completion:

You move 6 million yards, and what do you get?

Another day older and deeper in debt.

Saint Peter, don't you call us, 'cause we can't go;

We owe our souls to the folks on the Oregon coast ... (mb)

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