

# Minto Island bridge delayed as permits await approval



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(Photo: Courtesy City of Salem)

Construction of the Minto Island Pedestrian Bridge and Trail, which was set to begin this summer, has hit a snag.

The 304-foot-long footbridge eventually will span the Willamette Slough from the south end of Riverfront Park and connect to Minto Brown Island Park. But a longer-than-expected wait to obtain permits — including approval from the U.S. Coast Guard to build a structure over a navigable waterway — will likely delay the start of the \$10 million project.

"It was never a question of if we will get permits. It was a question of when," said Allen Dannen, engineering program manager for the city of Salem. The new target date to begin construction is summer 2015, he said. That would push the project's expected completion date to 2016.

Environmental rules dictate that construction work in the river can only occur June through October. Bureaucratic delays for an array of state and federal permits have made the time frame "too compressed" to start construction this year, Dannen said.

Avid park users and city planners have long asserted that the bridge and 3,800-foot-long trail could transform Salem.

The single-span, steel and concrete bridge adds another link in a network of trails, which will stitch together South Salem, downtown and West Salem. The bridge would become a nexus connecting 1,000 acres of parks and more than 20 miles of off-street trails

In comparison, Central Park in New York City has a total of about 843 acres.

Salem Mayor Anna Peterson has emphasized parks and recreational opportunities as a means to burnish the city's image. Having a signature natural area, near the heart of downtown, could become a business recruiting tool, she said.

"Employees of today and tomorrow don't just look for a paycheck. They're looking for quality of life," Peterson said. Parks and trails are also another reason for people to come downtown, she said.

## Long time coming

Emil Graziani, a member of Friends of Two Bridges, a local nonprofit, said talk of building a bridge to Minto Brown Island goes back four decades to the early discussions about developing a park along Salem's waterfront.

"We have been hoping this would come along in our in lifetime," Graziani said. "It's going to be a great landmark for Salem."

Friends of Two Bridges also was an advocate for city's efforts to develop the Union Street Railroad Pedestrian Bridge, a redesigned railroad bridge in downtown Salem that had its grand opening in 2009.

The expected delay in building the bridge to Minto Island hasn't dampened Friends of Two Bridges' enthusiasm.

The Friends has started a fundraising campaign for the trail amenities, such as benches, bicycle racks and overlooks, Graziani said. It's also working with the city on a proposed program, where sponsors could pay for trail signage that would highlight points of interest, he said.

## Staging for the build

When work gets started on the bridge, the public may first notice building materials being staged near the Eco-Earth Globe sculpture — a remnant of the city's industrial past that once was a tank for holding acids used in paper pulp manufacturing — on the south side of Riverfront Park.

About 18 trees, mostly pines, already have been removed from Riverfront Park in preparation for the construction. The area eventually will be replanted.

Next, construction crews will build a temporary bridge across the Willamette Slough. That will give workers a platform to stand on, as they build the permanent pedestrian and bike bridge.

Arches for the bridge will be steel tubes that are 30-inches in diameter. Deck panels will be made with concrete, reinforced with steel cables.

Out of about 15 major permits needed to build the bridge and trail, the permit from the U.S. Coast Guard is the only one that is still pending.

Dannen said the city expects that this last permit will be issued by July or August. He said he wasn't aware of any issues that might drag out the U.S. Coast Guard's review.

The Willamette Queen — a river excursion company that had objected to the footbridge because it could interfere with its operations — agreed to accept \$250,000 from the city in 2011 to give up use of the Willamette Slough. The riverboat owners are no longer contesting the project, Dannen said.

mrose@StatesmanJournal .com (503) 399-6657 or on Twitter @mrose\_sj

## **Funding**

The Minto Island Pedestrian Bridge and Trail has been fully funded.

Salem's Urban Renewal Agency has allocated more than \$6.1 million for design, permitting and construction.

Other funding from grants and private sources has raised the grand total dedicated to the project to nearly \$10 million.

Source: City of Salem

## **What's next**

The Minto Island Pedestrian Bridge and Trail project will likely have a revised schedule after unexpected holdups in getting permits.

Advertising for construction bids is expected to begin in the fall, contracts are expected to be awarded in January and work in the river should begin by June 2015, city officials said.

Much of the construction work would be completed in 2015, but it would likely continue into the summer of 2016.

Source: City of Salem

## **Salem's growing park system**

The city of Salem has been busy acquiring waterfront property for parks. Two deals have come together in recent months:

- In October, the city added the northeast end of Minto-Brown Island, next to Minto-Brown Island Park, to its park system. The city plans to create walking and biking trails on the island.

Funding for the \$836,000 real estate purchase — plus \$375,000 for ongoing maintenance of the 307-acre property — came from a Bonneville Power Administration conservation program. BPA purchased the property from Boise Cascade. Ownership of the land was transferred to the city with the understanding that the property would be preserved as a conservation area.

The island's northern tip still is owned by the Salem Audubon Society.

- The city also has a pending \$2 million deal to buy a 3.8 acre parcel near Salem's Riverfront Carousel from Mountain West Investment Corp. The land would become an extension of Riverfront Park.

The property deal, made public in January, is part of a public-private partnership between the city and Mountain West.

Mountain West wants the city to take over the "Park Parcel," while it redevelops other portions of the former Boise Cascade property. The sale of the park land, which is still in the due diligence phase, is expected to close by the end of the year.

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