

European asphalt comes to Portland

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Transportation officials cite environment benefits for I-405 project

(Portland, Oregon) -- Europe is frequently looked to as a source of art and fashion trends.

But now Europe is providing the region with innovative approaches to a much more basic product – asphalt.

State and city transportation agencies recently used a new asphalt product on two street repaving projects. And beginning this Friday, another European-inspired asphalt product will be used to repave the Interstate 405 freeway between the Marquam and Fremont bridges.

In both cases, transportation officials say the new products offer environmental benefits, ranging from lower greenhouse gas emissions to longer wear requiring fewer repairs.

The two street paving projects happened in July. The first was a stretch of Northeast 122nd Avenue between Burnside and Holliday streets. The second was a portion of 122nd between Market Street and Powell Boulevard.

In both cases the street sections were repaved with Warm Mix Asphalt products that are prepared and applied between 50 degrees and 100 degrees cooler than traditional Hot Mix Asphalt products. The first project used a product called Evotherm by MedWestvaco. The second one used Advera by the PQ Corp.

According to the Portland Bureau of Transportation, WMA products have several advantages over HMA ones. They include lower energy consumption to produce the products, along with a reduction in associated greenhouse gas emissions from burning the fuels to heat them.

“The reduction in fuel usage to produce the mix could also have an impact on the cost of transportation construction projects,” according to an Aug. 7 agency press release. “In addition, the reduced temperatures allows the material to be hauled farther and placed in lower temperatures which could extend the paving season for this part of the county.”

The bureau will compare the two stretches with other traditionally repaved ones between now and the winter. It is possible WMA will be used in the major of paving and repaving projects in coming years.

I-405 project challenges

A different form of European-developed asphalt is scheduled to used on the I-405 repaving project. Called Stone Matrix Asphalt, it can be applied thinner than traditional asphalt mixed – but is also supposed to be more durable.

These two qualities are especially important for the I-405, says Ron Larson, the Oregon Department of Transportation's project manager. For starters, there are five overpasses with limited clearances on the section of I-405 scheduled to be repaved.

“We literally cannot increase the height of I-405 at all, so SMA is a big advantage there,” he said.

And of course, I-405 is very busy, making it difficult to schedule repairs.

The repaving project will close portions of I-405 on four coming weekends through mid-September. It is set to occur between 10 p.m. on Fridays and 5 a.m. on Mondays. All lanes of traffic in one direction will be closed on each of the weekends. The ramps connecting those lanes to other roads will also be closed.

“We are asking people to plan ahead, to take their time and be patient,” said Oregon Department of Transportation spokeswoman Christine Miles.

Both bridges will remain open during the repaving, with traffic in the affected lanes being detoured off I-405 before

the construction zones. Interstate 5 is the major alternative route through Portland. Routes in and out of downtown and the Pearl District will also be marked.

The first weekend a direction is closed, the old asphalt will be removed and the new asphalt will be applied on those lanes. The second weekend the lanes are closed, the signs will be replaced and the lanes will be restriped.

The construction schedule is subject to change, depending on weather and other conditions. The current schedule is as follows:

- Friday, Aug. 14, through Monday, Aug. 17: All northbound lanes and ramps on I-405 will be closed between the bridges. Southbound lanes and ramps will remain open.
- Friday, Aug. 21, through Monday, Aug. 24: All southbound lanes and ramps on I-405 will be closed between the bridges. Lanes and ramps on northbound I-405 will remain open.
- Friday, Aug. 28, through Monday, Aug. 31: Southbound I-405 will once again be closed. Northbound I-405 will remain open.
- Friday, Sept. 11, through Monday, Sept. 14: Northbound I-405 will be closed. Southbound I-405 will remain open.

The project is budgeted at \$11.6 million, with about 30 percent of the money coming from federal stimulus program, officially known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

The work will be done by Kerr Contractors Inc. of Woodburn.

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