Massive excavation project necessary before Carson City I-580 connector can be paved



Crews work five days a week hauling 3,000 yards of dirt for what will be an extension of Interstate 580 in Carson City. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

CARSON CITY – The pile of dirt at the end of Spooner Summit in Carson City never seems to change. Grown men in what look like life-size Tonka trucks move it around, and yet, it still seems to stay the same.

For 16 hours a day, six days a week, dirt moves under the highway via a 2,600-foot conveyor belt to the other side of the street, where another pile is being created. On the

Spooner side it is a 1,500-foot-long continuous belt.

While it may seem like not much is happening, behind the 40-foot dirt wall that faces drivers as they descend into the capital city is a trove of workers excavating dirt for what in 2017 will be the extension of Interstate 580 from Fairview Drive to Spooner Summit.

A feeder – which looks like a grain feeder – separates out the larger rocks before it goes onto the conveyor belt.

The reason to move the dirt under South Carson Street is to keep trucks off the road, thus reducing traffic jams.



In 2017 the connector to Fairview Drive will be complete. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Road and Highway Builders based in Sparks this spring was awarded the $42 million contract to complete the final section of Interstate 580. Work began in June on what will be two lanes each going north and south.

Behind the wall is a dozer pushing a scraper as it picks up

dirt with its belly. Backhoes are filling semi-trailers.

It's a methodical process to dig down about 30 feet. Six thousand yards of dirt are being moved each day. By the time the project is done it's estimated 600,000 yards will have been removed. The excavation work should be done in February.



Project manager Will Hellickson, left, and Mark Cooper with NDOT are the leaders on the project. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

"We are scraping to get down to the design elevation. We are close to the final grade," Mark Cooper, an engineer with the Nevada Department of Transportation, said as he and Will Hellickson with Road and Highway Builders gave *Lake Tahoe News* a tour of the project site.

Part of the reason to dig so deep is to help reduce the noise to the neighboring residential area. Plus, the interstate will go under Clearview Drive and Koontz Lane. Those overpasses were built with the anticipation I-580 would one day be a reality. Before work began the dirt was as high as the concrete on the overpasses.

As the excavation work is being done, so is some of the electrical. Crews are putting in the footings for the 14,000

feet of sounds walls. The decorative barriers will be 8- to 13-feet high. In some locations the houses will be as close as 50 feet from the interstate.



Footings for the retaining wall near neighborhoods are being put in. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

At various locations some of the 20,000 feet of storm drainpipe is at the ready to be installed.

As the highway gets closer to Fairway Drive it is level with the side streets. NDOT has secured a 300-foot right-of-way.

This section from Fairview to Spooner will be 3.2 miles. It is actually 1.8 miles longer than going from Spooner via South Carson Street to Fairview. Still, NDOT estimates the time saved will be five minutes on the interstate.

“Within the next two decades, an estimated 43,000 vehicles are anticipated to travel on the south end of the freeway daily,

meaning this time savings will really add up when considering all vehicles projected to drive the freeway every day," Meg Ragonese with NDOT told *Lake Tahoe News*.



The large pile of dirt will end up on the conveyor that goes under South Carson Street. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Until the Carson City Freeway project came into being Nevada was one of the few states where the capital did not connect to the federal interstate system.

There are no plans to continue Interstate 580 farther south.

What is in the future is an overpass at the bottom of Spooner. That is why the dirt is being stored – with the idea it will be used for that project. However, that may not break ground for another 20 years. It's dependent on funding. When the newest section of the interstate opens there will still be a light at the bottom of Spooner.



Excavated dirt is being piled near the bottom of Spooner Summit. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

“By constructing the southern end of the freeway as a signalized intersection instead of the previously-planned overpass, the department deferred approximately $20 million to $24 million of construction costs in today’s dollars,” Ragonese said. “With limited funding available, not constructing the freeway overpass over South Carson Street was the only way we were able to secure enough funding to open the last leg of the freeway to traffic in 2017.”

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Notes:

· Here is a **YouTube video** of the dirt conveyor system.