

Repairs for Cove bridges

• By Kiva Hanson •





PMG PHOTO: KIVA HANSON

The Jordan Road bridge over the Crooked River arm of Lake Billy Chinook, above, and the one over the Deschutes River arm will both receive repair work in the near future.

The Jefferson County Public Works Department has received approximately \$9 million in state and federal funding to repair two bridges on Jordan Road in Cove Palisades State Park. The bridges span the Deschutes and Crooked River arms of Lake Billy Chinook and see an average daily traffic of about 450 cars, with increased traffic expected.

“It’s a huge win for the county, for the residents and for everyone that enjoys Lake Billy and the Cove,” said Matt Powlinson, director of Jefferson County Public Works. “It’s going to allow us to have those bridges unrestricted for the next 20 to 30 years.”

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When Powlinson came on as a public works director in 2018, both bridges had been posted for load. This means weight restrictions on the bridge limited what could be transported across them. This means heavy loads and machinery can’t access the community of Three Rivers on the west side of the lake, adding cost and additional logistics to any projects across the bridge. Since he began with the department, Powlinson’s goal has been to get the bridges repaired so they can support a standard load.

“They’re posted for a 24-ton load restriction,” said Powlinson. “A legal load is 80 tons, so its less than half the weight. The bridges aren’t accessible to concrete trucks, dump trucks or freight vehicles.”

The roads, originally built in 1963, have undergone maintenance a few times since their construction. The most recent repairs were about 20 years ago. Currently, the Deschutes River bridge has a sufficiency rating of 53.9 and the Crooked River bridges rating is 44. A sufficiency rating scores bridges out of 100 based on their ability to serve their current purpose.

These repairs helped maintain the bridge, but more have been needed for the last decade. Both bridges have been determined by inspectors to need repairs or corrective action, with the focus on the main deck of the bridges. The bridge over the Crooked River requires more intensive repairs than the bridge over the Deschutes does.

“The bridges themselves are still in good shape,” said Powlinson. “The steel is good, but certain parts wear out and need a remodel and update.”

The funding to repair the bridges total about \$9 million, with a 10% match from the county. The grant is part of the local bridges program from the Oregon Department of Transportation. It provides funding for repairs to the bridges like working on cable supports and gussets, strengthening cords and resurfacing the bridges.

These spot repairs will allow the bridges to function properly for the next few decades, saving the immense cost of bridge replacement was needed.

“The cost would skyrocket to replace the bridges,” said Powlinson. “It would increase the budget upwards of 10 times, so over \$90 million.”

A lot of this high price tag comes from the type of bridge. Suspension bridges are often used because they’re aesthetically pleasing, cover large distances and are light weight. However, they’re significantly more expensive than the standard bridge.

Jordan Road, which is the road that goes over both bridges, is the east access to the Three Rivers community, from the Madras-Culver area, and its very busy during the summer tourism season for Lake Billy Chinook.

Powlinson’s plans for the repairs involve no long-term closures of the road, since the detour would be over 80 miles longer. He hopes traffic delays will be minimal, as crews work in specific areas to keep the bridges open.

The funding cycle for the grant means construction won’t begin for a few years, as planning on engineering determines what repairs are needed. Powlinson hopes construction will begin in 2026.

“This really is a great upgrade, and I’m very excited that we are getting to do this project,” said Powlinson.