

Begin of Big Dig to Bring Out the Bigwigs

State and city officials, along with U.S. Rep. Norm Dicks, will be on hand Friday to launch work on the \$30.7 million Bremerton traffic tunnel.

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BREMERTON

The \$30.7 million tunnel project designed to send underground more than half the vehicles driving off the Bremerton ferry gets its ceremonial first shovel Friday.

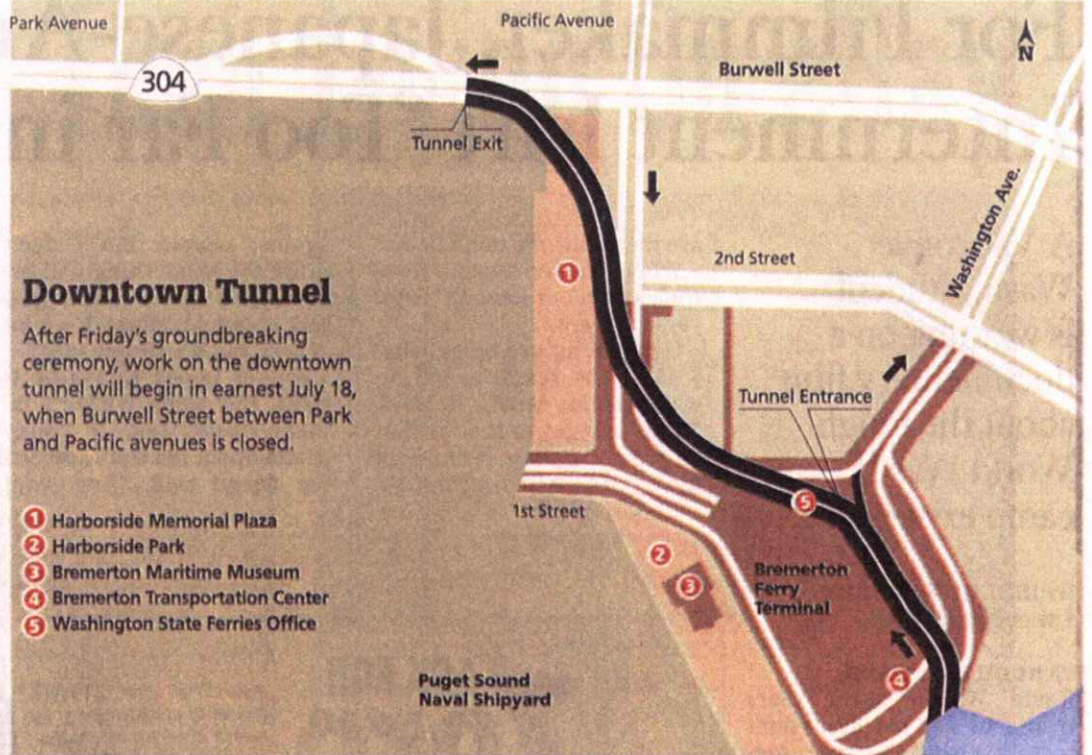
July 18, however, will likely be the most important date for residents and travelers. That's when Burwell Street between Park and Pacific avenues will be closed, said John Lefotu, assistant project manager for the state Department of Transportation. The closure is likely to last until the tunnel is finished in spring 2009, he said.

Lefotu said the street will remain closed throughout the project for two reasons. The state will have equipment on property along Burwell where buildings will be demolished and the closure also will accommodate a city project to install a new stormwater sewer pipe.

When complete, the 959-foot vehicle tunnel will be the exit route for 65 percent of drivers leaving the ferry, if the state's projections hold true.

So instead of using Washington Avenue and then turning left after passing the J.C. Penney building, they'll get from the terminal to a spot on Burwell between Park and Pacific under cover.

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Downtown Tunnel

After Friday's groundbreaking ceremony, work on the downtown tunnel will begin in earnest July 18, when Burwell Street between Park and Pacific avenues is closed.

- 1 Harborside Memorial Plaza
- 2 Harborside Park
- 3 Bremerton Maritime Museum
- 4 Bremerton Transportation Center
- 5 Washington State Ferries Office

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The project was controversial from the time the city first proposed it. Critics said there were cheaper surface options that would allow pedestrians to cross the streets safely during the traffic rush caused by ferry arrivals. An effort to get an advisory vote of Bremerton residents failed in court in June 2005.

City officials continue to emphasize the tunnel's importance to ongoing downtown redevelopment efforts.

"It is fundamental to creating a pedestrian-friendly environment in downtown Bremerton," said Gary Sexton, the city's redevelopment projects administrator. "We have essentially two streets — one going in, one going out — used for pedestrians and vehicles. It is the same problem being faced by every urban waterfront city of how you recapture the waterfront

streets that became parking lots or were dramatically widened to accommodate vehicles."

Sexton said the vehicle tunnel will help create a downtown safer for pedestrians, something city officials have been seeking since redevelopment efforts were launched.

If the city's efforts are successful, there will be more pedestrians to be concerned about. Some of the downtown waterfront condos in The 400 are already open, while the Harborside condos being built by the Kitsap Consolidated Housing Authority are soon to be finished. Kitsap Credit Union's location downtown has brought more people downtown, both employees and students attending the trade school housed in the building. And Bellevue developer Ron Sher has plans to turn the former J.C. Penney building from a parking

garage into a retail and residential complex.

As part of the project, the city will place a new pipe alongside the tunnel to send downtown stormwater to an existing outfall south of the ferry terminal. Phil Williams, Bremerton's public works director, said the stormwater project accounts for a little more than \$1 million in the overall tunnel project cost.

Friday's ceremony will include comments from state and city officials, as well as from U.S. Rep. Norm Dicks, D-Belfair, who is credited with coming up with the tunnel idea and getting the federal money to pay for it. The event is scheduled for 10 a.m. Friday at the former Les Schwab Tire Center at 628 Burwell St.

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