The contractor Seattle Tunnel Partners reached tunneling breakthrough on April 4, 2017 when Bertha broke into the disassembly pit near Seattle Center.

The double-deck viaduct along the Seattle Waterfront will be demolished to make way for a new surface street and new public spaces.

The Alaskan Way Viaduct, an elevated section of State Route 99 in Seattle, was built in the 1950s, and decades of daily wear and tear have taken their toll on the structure. Because of the viaduct’s age and vulnerability to earthquakes, replacing it is critical to public safety.

The Alaskan Way Viaduct Replacement Program will change how people use SR 99 in Seattle. A new, tolled tunnel will provide a direct route for bypassing downtown Seattle. Ramps near the stadiums at the tunnel’s south end will connect to SODO and downtown. At the tunnel’s north end, John, Thomas and Harrison streets will be reconnected, improving east-west travel in the area while providing on and off-ramps to SR 99.

After the SR 99 tunnel opens, the viaduct will be demolished and the City of Seattle will build a new waterfront Alaskan Way surface street linking the tunnel’s south end with the waterfront and downtown.

Looking ahead to viaduct demolition

When the SR 99 tunnel is ready for traffic, the Alaskan Way Viaduct will be permanently closed. During the closure, crews will build road and ramp connections to connect SR 99 to the new tunnel at both ends. Then the tunnel will open, and the big job of demolishing the viaduct will begin.

Demolishing the viaduct is expected to take up to nine months. It will be done in phases to minimize disruption to nearby buildings and roads. The work will also involve shifting Alaskan Way to the west so it’s not beneath the structure and can remain open during demolition.

WSDOT is planning on selecting a contractor in early 2018. The contractor will determine the methods of demolition, but the contract will include many stipulations, such as maintaining continuous access to Colman Dock, limiting road closures, minimizing dust and vibration, and protecting buildings and utilities.

Want more information about viaduct demolition?

Send an email to viaduct@wsdot.wa.gov and ask to receive updates on demolition.

You will receive the latest information about viaduct demolition as more information becomes available.

For more information

Visit the website at www.AlaskanWayViaduct.org
Call the hotline at 1-888-AWV-LINE
Send an email to viaduct@wsdot.wa.gov
Follow on Twitter: @BerthaDigsSR99

Building a new State Route 99 through Seattle

The program at a glance

- Removing the Alaskan Way Viaduct will clear the way for new public space on Seattle’s downtown waterfront.
- Since breaking ground on our first viaduct-related project in 2007, we have successfully completed 24 projects that were led or funded by the state.
- Construction of the largest project – the SR 99 tunnel – began in 2011. Tunneling beneath Seattle minimizes traffic disruptions while we replace the viaduct.
- The tunneling machine “Bertha” finished mining in April 2017.
- The major work remaining before the tunnel opens to traffic is removing the tunneling machine, building and testing the highway and critical systems inside the tunnel, and connecting SR 99 to the tunnel at both ends.

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Funding the program

The state is responsible for leading or funding 32 of the projects that will function together to reshape the SR 99 corridor. The state’s legislatively approved budget for the viaduct replacement projects is $3.2 billion. Funding comes from state, federal and local sources, as well as the Port of Seattle and tolls. Of that amount, approximately $2 billion is allocated to the SR 99 Tunnel Project. Seattle Tunnel Partners’ contract is for $1.5 billion.

Major elements of the program:

- A two-mile-long tunnel beneath downtown Seattle (in construction).
- A mile-long stretch of new SR 99 highway south of the future tunnel (complete).
- A new Alaskan Way surface street connecting the southern end of SR 99 to downtown Seattle (in design).
- A new overpass south of downtown that allows traffic to bypass train blockages near the Port of Seattle (complete).
- Demolition of the remainder of the viaduct (in design).

South end of the tunnel

In summer 2017, drivers on SR 99 snake their way around the future on- and off-ramps to the SR 99 tunnel. In the middle of the south portal, the future northbound off-ramp has been built, featuring innovative columns designed to bend in an earthquake without breaking.

With tunneling complete, crews are demobilizing the launch pit area and disassembling the apparatus that supported the tunneling machine. Before the tunnel opens, crews will build new roads to connect the current SR 99 lanes to the tunnel’s entrance and exit ramps.

North end of the tunnel

In summer 2017 the north end of the tunnel looks very similar to how the area will look when the tunnel opens. Remaining work involves removing the tunneling machine from the tunnel, expected to be completed in summer 2017, and connecting the now-completed on- and off-ramps to the tunnel, which will happen shortly before the tunnel opens to traffic.

When the tunnel opens, crews will reconnect Harrison Street across what is today SR 99. Later, crews will reconnect John and Thomas streets, improving east-west connections in the neighborhood.