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Changing landscape

Interstate 74 looks pretty torn up now, but massive overhaul is just getting started

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PEORIA - The landscape at the foot of the Murray Baker Bridge has changed considerably since second stage work began on the Interstate 74 overhaul, but that transformation will pale compared to what the same area will look like next spring.

Volk oversees the second-stage contract in which the bridge that carries the most traffic over the Illinois River daily will be shut down for six months during renovations.

That portion of the project also covers interstate reconstruction between the bridge and the Monroe Street overpass Downtown.

"The vast majority of that work will be done between April 2 and October 2005," Volk said. "Right now, we are working on the new tunnel."

During that same time, much of the interstate through Downtown will be closed, with traffic routed through town and over the Bob Michel Bridge to traverse the area.

Truckloads of earth already have been excavated from Volk's area northeast of the Adams Street interchange, where one of two tunnels are being built into the reconstructed interstate.

The second tunnel, which will feed traffic onto westbound I-74 from near OSF Saint Francis Medical Center, has been partially built and will be

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finished during the third stage of the overhaul in late 2005 and 2006.

The tunnel currently under construction near the Adams interchange will move traffic onto westbound I-74 from Washington Street, under Adams near its intersection with Spalding Avenue.

Volk said crews have unearthed countless boulders, parts of the original Washington Street and pieces of foundations from buildings

long demolished while digging into and grading the ground to build the tunnel.

"It's almost like a rock quarry," he said.

Also uncovered with the sediment were piles of broken bottles and dishes, or "anything that could have been in the basement of an old building."

When stage two construction wraps up late next year, \$55 million will have been poured into the area Volk oversees, as will thousands of hours of labor.

Volk said crews will work six or seven days a week, on the job 20 or 24 hours each day, to complete one of the most daunting tasks of the overhaul on one of the tightest deadlines.

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