

History revisited: Bridge's restoration begins in weeks

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After years of battles over whether it should be demolished, the historic Kinsol Trestle railway bridge will finally begin a multi-million-dollar facelift in just a few weeks.

Restoration work will start in mid-June on the 187-metre-long trestle, which rises 38 metres above the river, making it the tallest wooden railway trestle in Canada. The bridge runs over the Koksilah River in the Cowichan Valley, 20 kilometres southwest of Duncan. It was built in the 1920s and used by trains until 1979.

A study commissioned by the provincial government found the trestle was beyond repair, prompting the province to promise funding for its demolition and construction of a replica to replace it. But the push for demolition was met by a public outcry, and a subsequent study found the trestle could be restored.

Seventeen columns that hold up the trestle will be replaced. Roughly a third of the remaining structure will be bolstered by new Douglas fir.

"We're only replacing what we have to," said Norm Olive, manager of capital projects for the Cowichan Valley Regional District. "We are not replacing the good, sound part of the trestle that needs to be kept from a heritage point of view."

The trestle is now unusable because parts were destroyed by fire, but once the restoration work is complete, it will be open to pedestrians, cyclists and horses. "Part of the project is to put in a steel structure on top with a walkway," said Olive. "It's going to be placed on the trestle. That will be totally new."

That walkway will eventually become part of a link between the Galloping Goose Trail and Trans Canada Trail, offering a continuous path for pedestrians, cyclists and horses from downtown Victoria to Nanaimo. The route should be completed by 2012, said Brian Farquhar, CVRD manager of parks and trails.

"It will be the best 200 kilometres anywhere in Canada with respect to the experiences that people will enjoy ... because of the diversity of what that 200 kilometres entails," said Farquhar. "Where else in Canada ... will people get that kind of experience and viewsapes?"

The project has a budget of \$6.5 million, with funding supplied by the regional district as well as federal and provincial grants, the Cowichan Foundation -- a non-profit society that contributed \$1 million -- and federal stimulus funds.

"Given the requirements of the stimulus funding, we have until March 31 to substantially

complete the project, and we are well on target to do that," Farquhar said.

An official opening will occur shortly after that date, said Olive, who estimated 30 to 40 workers will be needed.

The regional district has budgeted \$100,000 a year to maintain the trestle once the project is complete, Farquhar said. The Cowichan Foundation is also raising funds to do an additional \$1 million worth of restoration work on the trestle.

"We are all very excited about it," Olive said. "The more work we do now, the less work we'll have to do in the future."

Anyone interested in donating to the restoration work can go to www.kinsol.ca.

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