

Highway 1 reopens Friday

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WATSONVILLE — Quake-damaged Highway 1 will reopen Friday over Struve Slough, 35 days ahead of schedule.

The \$5.4-million earthquake repair project necessitated building two 800-foot-long, two-lane bridges over the slough on Highway 1 between Green Valley and Beach roads in Watsonville.

California Department of Transportation spokeswoman Lisa Murphy said the portion of Highway 1 will reopen mid-morning Friday. The repair job will formally be recognized at 1 p.m. Saturday in a ceremony presided over by U.S. Rep. Leon Panetta, D-Monterey.

The reopening is welcomed by commuters and tourists alike. Since the Oct. 17 earthquake, drivers had been rerouted around the closure by detours on either San Andreas or Lee roads. Tourism in Monterey and Carmel has been down an estimated 20 percent, said Nanette Belliveau, visitors and convention director for the Monterey Chamber of Commerce.

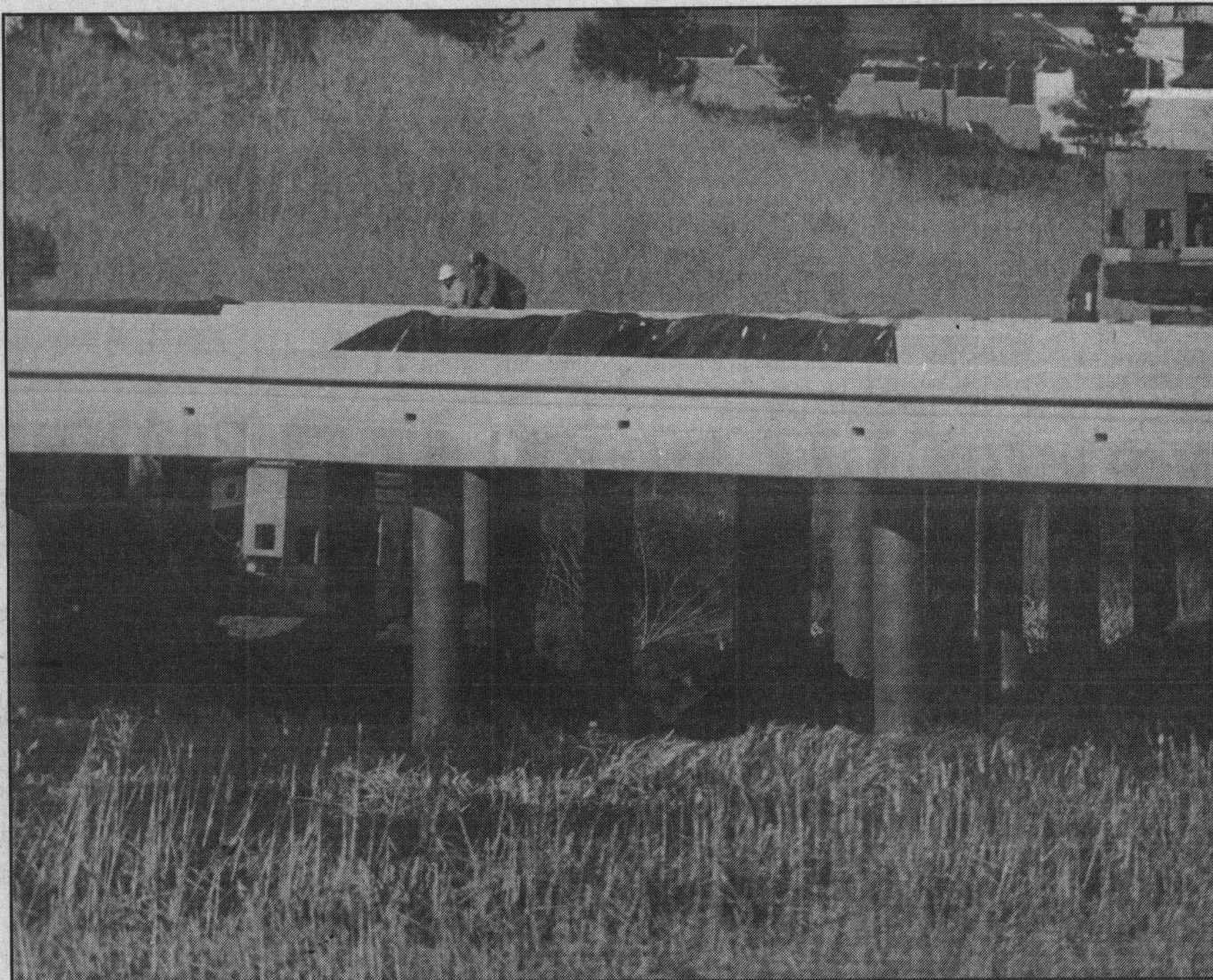
Santa Cruz County Transportation Commission Executive Director Linda Wilshusen said she is "pretty astounded" that the reopening is more than a month ahead of schedule. She said drier-than-normal weather and an incentive clause in the contract were primary reasons for the quick work.

Contractor C.C. Meyers of Rancho Cordova was working with incentive clauses that ranged from \$18,000 to \$30,000 per day for finishing early, said Dewey Lee, vice president of Meyers.

"Finishing early was a result of working around the clock," Lee said. "We had more than 40 crew members, not including many more sub-contractors, working two 12-hour shifts. We only took Christmas and New Year's off."

Because the work was completed within 180 days of the earthquake, the total replacement cost will be paid by the federal government.

Congressman Panetta lauded the "total team effort" by federal, state and local officials, along with the private sector. "By working together, we were able to keep this project moving at an accelerated pace," he said. "Without this cooperation, rebuilding of the Struve Slough bridge could never have been finished so soon."



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

State highway workers are done rebuilding the quake-damaged section of Highway 1 over Struve Slough.

The twin bridges, designed by Caltrans' engineers, incorporates the latest in seismic design, said Caltrans' Director Robert Best.

For instance, the pilings are 24 inches in diameter rather than the previous 15 inches. They were sunk as deep as 110 feet into the earth. The driving of the piles — heavy metal hitting metal — resulted in dozens of noise complaints to the Watsonville Police Department from residents in the Green Valley area.

To improve the strength of the new bridges, the deck was rebuilt with a

thicker, "slab design," tied to the thicker, steel-encased pilings. Because the slough was soft, workers constructed a firm pad on which to set the heavy pile-driving equipment.

The failed bridges were built more than two decades ago on the unstable marshland. During the earthquake, decking slid right off pilings. The pilings below the southbound deck crumbled except for a few that dramatically pierced the concrete. The northbound deck sagged on partially crumbled pilings.

The new bridge is designed to withstand a magnitude-8 temblor. Special measures are also being taken to preserve endangered long-toed salamanders that live in the slough, said Ron Maasberg, senior structures engineer for the contractor.

Workers will leave the rain-laden dirt behind and return to collect it next summer. By that time, it will have dried out, and the endangered salamanders will have abandoned the mud fill for wetter places in the marsh, Maasberg said.