

WESTERN BUILDER



James Peterson Sons Inc. Leads Reconstruction of WIS 47 Through Menominee Tribal Lands

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Planning and Teamwork Keep Menominee County's WIS 47 Project
Moving on Schedule for James Peterson Sons Inc. *By Julie Devine*



Electrical and storm sewer is installed.

Situated in tribal lands of the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, the 2.62-mile reconstruction of Wisconsin 47 in Keshena, Wisconsin, required an archaeologist onsite for all digging operations and ongoing coordination with tribal staff.

Spread over parts of two years, the six-phase project also included an assortment of traffic control measures and five multi-day holiday weekends when no work was allowed. However, with proactive planning through the COVID-19 pandemic and the help of numerous subcontractors, prime contractor James Peterson Sons, Inc. (JPS), of Medford, Wisconsin, remains on schedule to finish the project in November 2021.

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) awarded JPS the \$6 million, low-bid contract at the end of July 2020. Crews started on the first stage of work in September 2020.

Funded by a combination of state, federal, and local transportation dollars, "This project was needed due to pavement distresses, including longitudinal and transverse cracking and wheel-path transverse cracking at intersections," said Stacy Hagenbucher, WisDOT North Central Region Project Manager.

In addition, "Pedestrians and bicyclists previously used the shoulder or travel lane along WIS 47," Hagenbucher said. "This project provides designated bicycle lanes and sidewalks with crosswalks. The project also addresses limited clear zones, steep side slopes, and shoulder edge drop-offs with grading practices. Finally, lighting is being added throughout the project."

Originally built in 1951, the roadway was last overlaid in 1999. In this project, most of WIS 47 between Duquaine Road

and County VV – including the Wolf River Bridge – receives a structural overlay. Between North Junction Tribal Loop and Fairgrounds Road, crews are reconstructing the highway. The project also improves the turning radius at one intersection, adds a new box culvert, and reconstructs all curb ramps to meet current Americans with Disabilities Act requirements. Throughout the corridor, crews are replacing culverts and guardrails and working on curbs, gutters, and storm sewers.

Working on Tribal Land
With the project located on tribal lands within a highway easement, "WisDOT partnered with the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin to design and build a project that benefits both the local tribal community and the state transportation system," said Dan Erva, WisDOT North Central Region Project Development Supervisor.

In project planning, "The tribe has its own bodies of government that we worked with, in addition to our typical points of contact," Hagenbucher said.

When it came time for construction, "This project utilized the Native American Hiring Provision (NAHP) that encouraged the use of Native American subcontractors as well as hiring of tribal members," Hagenbucher said.

WisDOT implements the NAHP as part of contract specifications for construction projects on or adjacent to tribal lands throughout the state. The process includes a coordination meeting with the prime contractor, subcontractors, WisDOT, and tribal staff to discuss project details and coordination expectations. Tribal Labor staff can also bring individuals interested in applying for work with the project's contractors.

KEY PROJECT PERSONNEL

- **Owner** – Wisconsin Department of Transportation; Stacy Hagenbucher, North Central Region Project Manager
- **Consultant Engineer** – JT Engineering, Inc., Green Bay, Wisconsin; Kevin Lohff, Project Manager
- **Prime Contractor** – James Peterson Sons, Inc., Medford, Wisconsin; Larry Burkhart, Project Manager; Paul Rothmeier, Foreman; Andy Maas, Storm Sewer Foreman
- **Concrete Subcontractor** – Sommers Construction Co., Inc., Shiocton, Wisconsin
- **Electrical and Lighting Subcontractor** – Bodart Electric Service, Inc., De Pere, Wisconsin
- **Bridge Deck Replacement Subcontractor** – Lunda Construction Co., Black River Falls, Wisconsin
- **Seeding, Mulching, and Erosion Control Subcontractor** – Smith Restorations, Inc., Stanley, Wisconsin
- **Traffic Control Subcontractor** – Rent-a-Flash of Wisconsin, Inc., Marathon, Wisconsin
- **Box Culvert Subcontractor** – GJ Grube Construction Co., Chilton, Wisconsin
- **Paving Subcontractor** – Northeast Asphalt, Greenville, Wisconsin



The new roadway is graded.

As construction progresses, “If we or our subcontractors need additional help, we ask the tribal employment office first,” said Larry Burkhart, Project Manager for JPS. “If they have anyone qualified, those individuals have first chance at being hired.”

For JPS and their already diverse workforce, the provision didn’t require much change in how they normally hire, Burkhart said. However, performing the work on tribal land did involve additional personnel.

“You have an archaeologist or two onsite at all times when you’re digging,” Burkhart explained. “They keep an eye out for bones and artifacts. Luckily, we haven’t found anything so far on this project. If we do, they have to conduct a study that would basically shut the project down, potentially for a long time.”

Maintaining the Schedule

In 2020, JPS completed stage 1 of the project, a box culvert underneath the highway in a trout stream.

“That work needed to be done last fall so it didn’t impact the spawning of any fish,” Burkhart said. “We finished up at the end of the first week of November, so there wasn’t enough time in the work season to do more. By that time, it gets too cold here for any paving or concrete work.”

Crews started again in early April 2021. As they proceed with stages 2 through 6, “The work flows together, with the stages divided in terms of the type of work or traffic maintenance at the time,” Burkhart said.

For traffic control, WisDOT specified a variety of methods. “A partial detour was

used for a portion of the project, while traffic signals and flagging were used on the remaining portions,” Hagenbucher said. “This was done to maintain access and limit the detour length for the locals.”

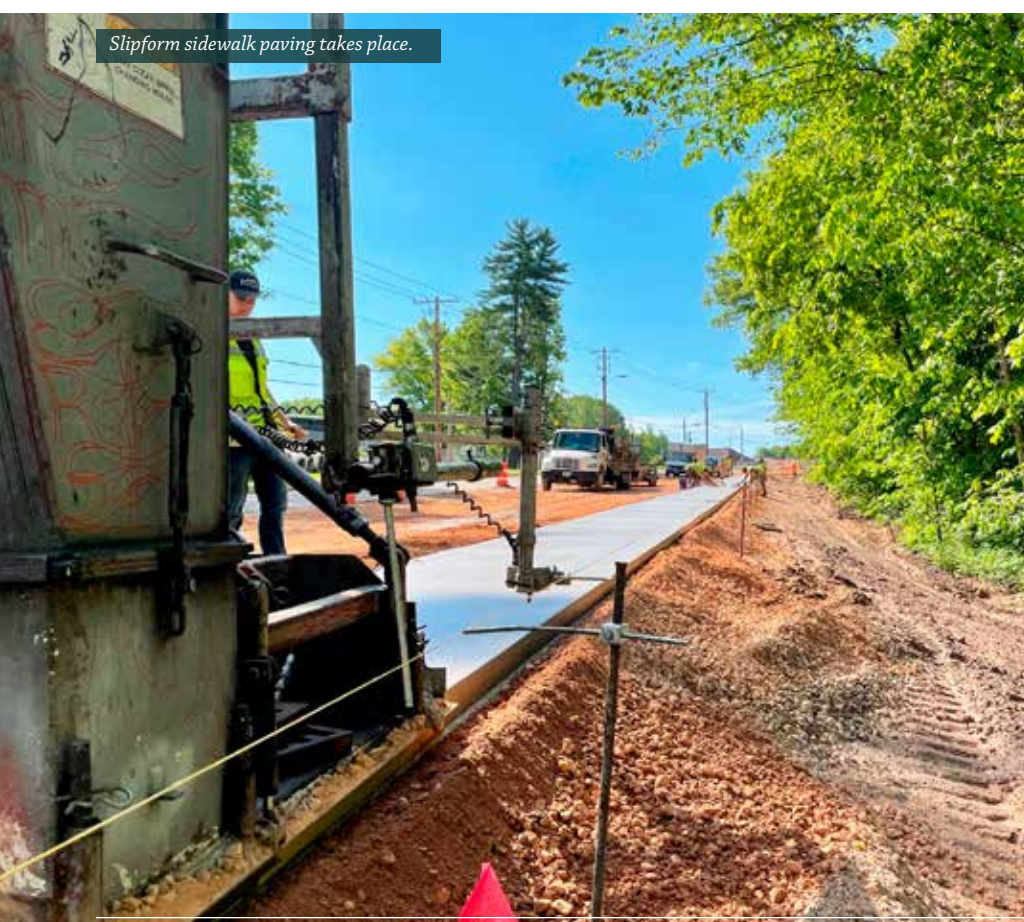
To further minimize impacts, the project staggered brief side road closures to avoid impacting consecutive roads. As work passed by a local high school, crews rebuilt the entrance in halves to maintain access.

Overall, “It’s been a pretty smooth-flowing project,” Burkhart said. “Utilities were all moved very timely. That’s a big thank you to the tribal utility coordinator, who did an excellent job. In addition, the soils have done very well. In fact, there are probably fewer soil issues than what WisDOT expected.”

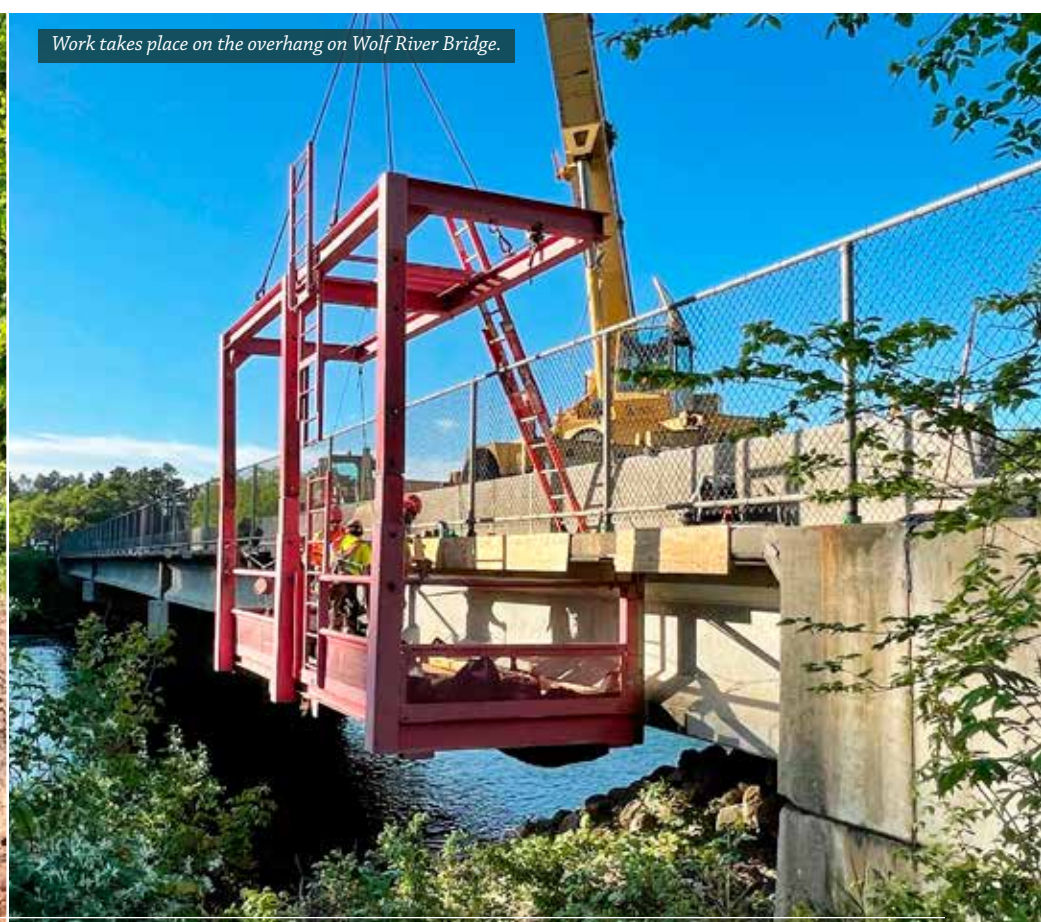
Because the project started in the midst of the pandemic, “We ordered all of our materials early and so did our subcontractors,” Burkhart said. “In all our projects during the pandemic, as soon as we get a contract from the DOT, we get our materials ordered. Thankfully, this project has avoided any COVID impacts.”

Burkhart credits much of the smooth flow to the project’s subcontractors. (See “Key Project Personnel” sidebar.) “The key to a successful project is having successful subcontractors,” he said.

Photos courtesy of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation



Slipform sidewalk paving takes place.



Work takes place on the overhang on Wolf River Bridge.