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Tunnels on John Wayne Pioneer Trail across Snoqualmie Pass closed to recreation

Former railroad tunnels on a popular recreational trail across Snoqualmie Pass are closed until further notice because of falling-debris hazards.

By [Lynda V. Mapes](#)

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Cyclists ride in the Snoqualmie Pass Tunnel, now closed by the state because of a falling-debris hazard.

Tunnels on the John Wayne Pioneer Trail, a popular mountain-biking and hiking route across Snoqualmie Pass, are closed until further notice because of falling-debris hazards.

The tunnels need an estimated \$9 million in repairs, and money to even begin the work still needs to be found; it's been requested in the state budget and in the federal stimulus package under consideration by Congress, according to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission.

Until money is found and the work can be done, tunnels 46 through 50 — from Thorp, in Kittitas County, westward to Snoqualmie Pass — will be closed, the parks agency said Friday. There is no estimated reopening date.

There's no danger of cave-in or collapse. But debris such as rocks could fall, causing injury, said Daniel Farber, a staff manager for the commission. "We determined there is enough risk to close (the tunnels) now."

An estimated 215,000 people use the trail every year. It's prized by Seattle-area cyclists and other recreationists seeking a route over the pass other than Interstate 90.



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"It's a popular trail, there are a lot of people who like to do it, whether expert mountain bikers or beginners, and even kids," said Chuck Ayers, executive director of the Cascade Bicycle Club, which with 11,500 members calls itself the largest bicycle club in the country.

"My bottom line is I would rather they close it, public safety comes first."

The closure seemed to take cycle advocates by surprise.

"This is the first I have heard of it," said Dave Janis of the Bicycle Alliance of Washington, a statewide bicycle-advocacy organization based in Seattle with 2,800 members. "It must be pretty bad if they are closing it so quickly."

Janis said the trail will be missed once the cycling season really gets under way.

"People really love to use the tunnels, because they get very dark. It's fun and very accessible, and a lot of people use the trail to get across the state.

"I can't imagine people would want to use I-90, certainly not families. There is a lot of heavy truck traffic, it's not a pleasant experience."

This month a consultant hired to conduct a safety review of falling-debris hazards in the tunnels gave hazard ratings from moderate to very high for Boylston Tunnel No. 46 and Picnic Area Tunnel No. 47, both near Thorp; Easton Tunnel No. 48; Whittier Tunnel No. 49, west of Easton; and the 2.3-mile-long Snoqualmie Pass Tunnel No. 50, with its eastern portal near Hyak.

The trail is normally open to nonmotorized use only, except in winter months when snowmobilers also are permitted.

The trail winds through Iron Horse State Park, a 1,612-acre park that was part of the route of the Chicago-Milwaukee-St. Paul-Pacific Railroad. The tunnels date to around 1910. Some were carved out of solid rock, but others were built of looser material, and concrete used in the tunnels was not always of the best quality.

The state acquired the right of way in 1981 and 1982 for the trail.

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