



Sewer district lawsuits; an assault at 'Wicked'; and overpasses and underpasses in Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls: Whatever happened to?

By Plain Dealer staff

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Joshua Gunter, The Plain Dealer

This photo, taken in April 2007, shows a completed section of one of Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District's subway-sized tunnels built to move sewage and rainwater that in the past was dumped directly into nearby waterways during heavy storms.

"Whatever happened to . . .?" is a weekly series updating some of the most newsworthy and interesting local stories covered in The Plain Dealer. Have a suggestion on a story we should update? Send it to **John C. Kuehner**.

Today, we answer these questions:

Whatever Happened to the lawsuits between the regional sewer district and its contractors?

Whatever happened to Kathleen Holmes, the woman arrested Dec. 8 during a scuffle at the Broadway musical "Wicked" at PlayhouseSquare's Palace Theatre?

Whatever happened to proposed railroad overpasses and underpasses in Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls?

Whatever Happened to the lawsuits between the regional sewer district and its contractors?

The Northeast Regional Sewer District is involved in two suits that kept projects stalled for years and are now grinding their way through the court system.

A June court date has been set for a **fight that erupted over the last leg of the \$200 million Mill Creek tunnel project**. The project included a subway-size sewer to help relieve overflow in Garfield Heights, but it stopped in 2004 when a methane gas leak was discovered.

Work restarted more than seven months later on the project that was expected to cost more than \$58 million, but in 2007 the contractor and the sewer district got into a dispute over the money the company got while it was idled. The price tag for the project had grown by more than \$12 million.

The sewer district stopped paying in 2007 and the contractor sued. The district counter sued and work stopped.

Late last year, more than two years after the work stopped the county hired a new company to finish the job within 550 days -- or approximately June 2011.

Meanwhile, a second lawsuit over the Big Creek project is scheduled for trial in October will go to mediation in April after both sides agreed.

That project remains unfinished, but the **residents on or near Ardoyne Avenue in Old Brooklyn at least have the weedy hole closed and Ardoyne Avenue** is reopened after a four-year standstill on project that was only supposed to take a year.

A dispute over who was at fault for a problem with the plastic coating that lines a tunnel stopped the project, the district sued the contractor and the designer. The sewer district agreed to spend \$600,000 last year to get the hole closed and reopen the street, saying they could get to the tunnel another way.

But the lining is still not fixed, however the sewer district is putting out the project for a bid this month.

-- **Joan Mazzolini**

Whatever happened to Kathleen Holmes, the woman arrested Dec. 8 during a scuffle at the Broadway musical "Wicked" at PlayhouseSquare's Palace Theatre?The 50-year-old Ashtabula County resident pleaded guilty in Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court on Feb. 23 to assaulting a police officer, court documents said, and was given a six-month suspended jail sentence and ordered to pay \$814 in fines and court costs.

Holmes, of Rock Creek, also agreed to enter Glenbeigh, a drug and alcohol



rehabilitation facility near her home, court documents said.

Cleveland police arrested Holmes after "Wicked" staffers and patrons said the apparently drunk woman screamed obscenities during one of the show's quietest musical numbers. She was handcuffed and dragged out 'the theater, police and witnesses said.

Dept.

**Police
mug shot of Kathleen
Holmes**

-- **Tony Brown**



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Andrew Cifranic, Special to The Plain Dealer

Workers install a new railroad crossing at Columbia Road in Olmsted Falls, in this photo taken in September 1995.

Whatever happened to proposed railroad overpasses and underpasses in Olmsted Township and Olmsted Falls?

Work is under way on an underpass on Columbia Road in Olmsted Falls.

In Olmsted Township, construction will begin next year on an overpass on Fitch Road and when that is done, work will begin on an overpass on Stearns Road, officials said.

Motorists, school bus drivers and safety forces in those communities have had their patience tested for years at railroad crossings. Up to 100 Norfolk Southern or CXS freight trains pass each day at each of the three roads, said Olmsted Falls Mayor Robert G. Blomquist.

"Our streets are blocked about six hours a day," Blomquist said.

Studies to improve the railroad crossings have ongoing since 2001. Federal money became available after the Surface Transportation Board agreed that the 1999 acquisition of Conrail by Norfolk Southern and CSX railroads had a substantial impact on rail traffic throughout southwest Cuyahoga County.

The Columbia Road underpass below CSX tracks should be completed by the end of the year and will cost about \$8 million, Blomquist said. Traffic on Columbia has not been affected since the underpass is being built about 110 feet west of the current road and will later be connected to the road.

The Cuyahoga County Engineers Office is in charge of the projects on Fitch and Stearns roads, which will go

over Norfolk Southern tracks.

The \$7.7 million Fitch Road project will begin in spring 2011 and be completed at the end of 2012. The \$9 million Stearns Road overpass will get underway in the summer of 2013 and open at the end of 2014, said an official at the engineers office. The Stearns Road railroad crossing is about one mile west of Fitch Road.

In Berea an \$18 million project to build bridges over two sets of tracks on Front Street just north of the Cleveland Browns practice facility has been underway for a year.

The road will rise about 25 feet as it crosses over Norfolk Southern and CSX tracks. It will eliminate traffic tie-ups caused when railroad gates close an average 170 times a day for freight trains. It is expected to be completed by the end of October.

A \$22 million railroad underpass on Bagley Road in Berea was completed in 2005.

Other Northeast Ohio communities have established quiet zones, where double gates or center road barriers keep vehicles from crossing tracks and allow trains to pass through without blowing their horns.

Quiet zones were built at three railroad crossings in Brook Park and are being planned in Macedonia and Vermilion.

-- **Karen Farkas**

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