



IT PROBABLY SHOULD have been a stop light, but Ron Solko could only replace this old stop sign at Hall Street and Penn Avenue with a shiny new one. Melvin Martin (behind the sign) assisted with the project. The stop lights were taken down when the city renewed the sidewalks around them, and now await some needed parts.

— Herald staff photo by Stephanie DeCamp

Parts ordered for old lights

Whether you prefer the traffic light or the four-way stop at the intersection of Hall Street and Penn Avenue, after a summer of seeing both, you may be wondering what exactly is going on.

The city, said Foreman Dan Castle, has ordered the one new traffic light it needs and is awaiting its delivery to get the lights back up and running.

"We've got (the light) ordered, along with one new mechanism, and it takes a while to get them," said Mr. Castle. "As soon as we get them in, we'll have the lights back up."

The holdup on the project, he explained, was that the city was trying to find the exact match to the existing traffic lights, and they couldn't.

"There was a name brand we'd been using in the past for traffic signals," he said, "for the lenses and lights and the whole thing, and we had to find another

outlet and brand to go through. We're going to use the three old ones and one new one. It was around \$1,000 for the one stop light itself, so you don't just go buy them."

Mr. Castle said he didn't know yet how much the project will cost altogether. As for when the lights will actually be up and working again, he said he didn't know.

"You can plan for things," he said, "but you know how plans go.... The whole thing started with the water pipe project they did. When they were doing that, they wiped out two of the corners at the intersection, and then we redid the other two. I don't know how long that stop sign has been up there at this point."

"They're on the way though, and once they get here, we'll have 'em back up."



RAILROAD EMPLOYEES REROUTED the track around a collapsed elevator in Oakley by pulling it to one side with a back hoe (above), then connecting the two ends with prebuilt track panels. After as much of the original track as possible had been pulled onto the new alignment, workers bolted in additional sections of rail to form a detour around the pile of spilled corn.

— Herald staff photo by Steve Haynes

Oakley elevator collapses

By SAM DIETER

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Part of the Frontier Ag grain elevator in Oakley collapsed last Tuesday, destroying two bins and spilling several thousand bushels of corn, which knocked over nearby railroad cars and blocked the Denver-Kansas City line of the Union Pacific Railroad.

Pappy Lies, emergency manager for Logan and Gove counties, said that no one was hurt when the concrete tubes at the southeast end of the elevator gave way about 2:22 p.m. Corn spilled out onto a nearby railroad track, derailling eight or nine empty alcohol tankers and closing the main line.

Mr. Lies said another six tank cars west of the spilled corn were full of liquid nitrogen, but those did not derail. The elevator is just west of downtown Oakley. Access through the downtown area was open, but some streets around the elevator were blocked off.

The collapse ruined the bottom part of the three bins. The top part was hanging at an angle, with large chunks of concrete hanging in the air, held up only by steel rebar.

Troopers from the Kansas Highway Patrol, deputies from the Thomas and Gove county sheriff's offices, emergency managers from Logan, Thomas and Russell counties, Oakley city police and firemen, Kansas Department of Transportation workers and others came to help, Mr. Lies said. On Tuesday afternoon, they were blocking off nearby streets to hold back bystanders. People were walking up to the scene or pulling up in cars took at the damage. A Highway Patrol airplane flew over the area.

"Our job is to keep the scene secured," Mr. Lies said Wednesday morning. "We've worked closely with UP and the facility."

Mark Davis, a spokesman for Union Pacific in Omaha, said that the rail cars were cleared from the track by about 1:30 a.m. Wednes-

day and railroad crews were laying 500 feet of temporary track, called a shoo-fly, around the site to get the trains running. He said that the track should be ready by 8 p.m. that night.

About 11 a.m. Wednesday, Mr. Lies said that a structural engineer was expected to evaluate the rest of the elevator before officials could determine if it's safe to work around.

"They've cleared what they could clear safely," he said. "We'll just hope that things continue to work well."

About two dozen vehicles were parked along a dirt road next to the elevator, many belonging to Union Pacific officials and workers who were laying the new track. The empty tank cars had been removed from the pile of grain. Six or seven were on the track on either side of the collapse, three were off the tracks and another 17 were on the tracks just east of the elevator.

Mr. Davis said that Union Pacific was holding all the traffic going through Oakley until the track is opened. He said that about eight Union Pacific trains pass through the town each day, including many coal trains from Colorado to eastern power plants.

"All we know is that there was not an explosion," said Ben Branvik, grain marketing manager for Frontier Ag in Goodland said. "Obviously, there was just a structural failure."

Branvik said that insurance adjusters would be coming, probably accompanied by the structural engineer, to assess the damage and see if the elevator can be rebuilt.

"It's just too early to say," Branvik said when asked what Frontier Ag will do next.

The best-case scenario, he said would be for the rest of the elevator to remain standing, and the worst case would be that the entire structure would have to be rebuilt.

The bypass track was open by

Wednesday evening, and trains began running. After the derailed cars were dragged out of the way, workers cut the rails on either side of the spill and moved the track to form a curve at either end. Pre-built "panel track" brought in by work trains connected the two ends, the crews spread crushed-rock ballast to hold and cushion the new track and keep the rails aligned. The bypass is only temporary, however.

"As soon as it's safe to get the main track back in service, that will be done," Mr. Davis said. "Once we're told that it's safe to work around there, I'm sure our team will start."

After a meeting of responders at 8 p.m. Wednesday, Mr. Lies said, emergency workers went home for some well-deserved rest. By that time, track crews had finished the shoo-fly and trains were running.

Thursday morning, the new track was open around the pile of grain at the bottom of the elevator. Emergency personnel and railroad workers were gone, and only "no parking" signs were left along Second Street where it passes the elevator.

"Actually, those rail cars are needed for service," Mr. Davis said of the ones parked beside the elevator. He said the derailed cars would be put back on their wheels or placed on a flatcar later, maybe seven to 14 days after an accident, and sent to a shop for repair. The parked cars will be moved away as soon as it's safe, he said, although he wasn't sure when that would be.

Mr. Lies said officials were really pleased with the cooperation among all the agencies that responded to the collapse.

"We've had very good cooperation from everyone," he said, "from the facility to all the responders, the surrounding counties and other agencies."

"It's worked out to make it as good as it could be in this situation."

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