

Space shuttle embarks on 12-mile trip to LA museum (Update)

October 12 2012, by Alicia Chang



Bob Olmscheid, right, prepares the street for the Space Shuttle Endeavour to roll through, Thursday, Oct. 11, 2012, in Los Angeles. Beginning Friday, the shuttle heads off on its last mission—a 12-mile creep through city streets. It will move past an eclectic mix of strip malls, mom-and-pop shops, tidy lawns and faded apartment buildings. Its final destination: California Science Center in South Los Angeles where it will be put on display. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

(AP)—At its prime, the space shuttle Endeavour cruised around the Earth at 17,500 mph (28,160 kph), faster than a speeding bullet.

In retirement, it's crawling along at a sluggish 2 mph (3 kph), a pace that rush-hour commuters can sympathize with.

Endeavour's 12-mile (19-kilometer) road trip kicked off shortly before midnight Thursday as it moved from its Los Angeles International Airport hangar en route to the California Science Center, its ultimate destination, said Benjamin Scheier of the center.

The space craft was escorted by a security entourage as it moved across the tarmac but was briefly delayed after a minor problem developed with its trailer, Los Angeles police Sgt. Rudy Lopez said. The problem was quickly repaired and Scheier said it reached the street shortly after 2 a.m. PDT (0900 GMT) Friday.

Endeavour was to travel slowly on the street for about two hours to a private parking lot where it will have a nine-hour layover as crews deal with power lines fatter ahead on the route.

While the shuttle will have the streets and sidewalks to itself during the two-day journey as it inches past strip malls, storefronts, apartment buildings and front lawns, it will be a constant stop-and-go commute.

Ushering a shuttle through an urban core is a logistical challenge that took almost a year to plan. Guarded by a security detail reminiscent of a presidential visit, police enforced rolling street and sidewalk closures as early as Thursday night in some locations and discouraged spectators from swarming side streets.

The behemoth transport has caused headaches for shopkeepers along the route who counted on cheering crowds jamming the curbs to boost business.

In the days leading up to Endeavour's move, the owners of Randy's

Donuts sold shuttle-shaped pastries emblazoned with the NASA logo and even hung a shuttle replica inside the giant doughnut hole sign visible from the busy Interstate 405.



A sign warns drivers of street closures for movement of the Space Shuttle Endeavour, Thursday, Oct. 11, 2012, in Los Angeles. Beginning Friday, the shuttle heads off on its last mission—a 12-mile creep through city streets. It will move past an eclectic mix of strip malls, mom-and-pop shops, tidy lawns and faded apartment buildings. Its final destination: California Science Center in South Los Angeles where it will be put on display. (AP Photo/Mark J. Terrill)

Co-owner Larry Weintraub planned to watch the shuttle creep by the roadside sign, which has been featured in several movies. But the store, which serves up sweets 24-7, will be closed Friday night.

"I'm still excited, but I'm disappointed that people aren't going to be able to stand in the streets and shout 'Yay,'" he said.

Saturday is typically the busiest day for James Fugate, who co-owns Eso Won Books in South Los Angeles. But with Endeavour expected to shuffle through, Fugate braced for a ho-hum day in sales.

"We don't close because we're slow. That's when you pull out a book to read," he said.

The baby of the shuttle fleet, Endeavour replaced Challenger, which exploded during liftoff in 1986, killing seven astronauts. It thundered off the launch pad 25 times, orbited Earth nearly 4,700 times and racked up 123 million miles.

Last month, it wowed throngs with a dizzying aerial loop, soaring over the state Capitol, Golden Gate Bridge, Hollywood Sign and other California landmarks while strapped to the back of a modified 747 before finally landing at LAX.

The last leg of Endeavour's retirement journey skips the tourist attractions and instead, winds through blue-collar communities in southern Los Angeles County. While viewing will be severely curtailed due to sidewalk shutdowns, crowds are still expected.

Moving the 170,000-pound (77,111-kilogram) Endeavour requires a specialized 160-wheel carrier typically used to haul oil rigs, bridges and heavy equipment. The wheels can spin in any direction, allowing the shuttle to zigzag past obstacles. An operator walks alongside, controlling the movements via joystick. Several spotters along the wings are on the lookout for hazards.

To make room for the five-story-tall shuttle and its 78-foot (24-meter)

wingspan, some 400 trees were chopped down, cable and telephone lines were raised, and steel plates were laid down to protect the streets and underground utilities.

Endeavour will mostly travel on wide boulevards with some boasting as many lanes as a freeway. While there have been advance preparations, there is remaining work to be done during the move, including de-energizing power lines. Southern California Edison warned of outages in the suburb of Inglewood.

One of the trickiest parts involves trundling through a narrow residential street with apartment buildings on both sides. With Endeavour's wings expected to intrude into driveways, residents have been told to stay indoors until the shuttle passes.

The route was selected after ruling out other options. Dismantling the shuttle would have ruined the delicate heat tiles. Helicoptering it to its destination was not feasible. Neither was crossing on freeways since the shuttle is too big to fit through the underpasses. The cost of transporting it cross-town was estimated at over \$10 million.

As complex as the latest endeavor is, Southern California is no stranger to moving heavy things.

In 1946, Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose" aircraft was built in sections and hauled from Culver City to Long Beach, 30 miles (50 kilometers) away. In 1984, an old United Airlines DC-8, with its wings and tail disassembled, was towed from Long Beach to the science center.

Earlier this year, a two-story-tall chunk of granite was hauled 105 miles (170 kilometers) from a rock quarry to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

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