From space to the LA streets: Shuttle's last trip

The Associated Press

Think launching a space shuttle is hard? Try moving it through a metropolis.

Early Friday, shuttle Endeavour begins a 12-mile journey from the Los Angeles International Airport to the California Science Center where it will be the centerpiece of a new exhibit.

To prepare for the two-day move, an army of workers cut down hundreds of trees, raised telephone lines and covered streets with steel plates to protect underground wiring. As Endeavour shuffles through Inglewood and South Los Angeles at 2 mph, crews will temporarily remove traffic signals, light poles and power lines.

HOW DOES THE SHUTTLE MOVE?

The 77-ton Endeavour is attached to a special 160-wheel transport system typically used to move bridge spans, drilling platforms and heavy equipment. The shuttle will not be traveling straight the entire way. It has the flexibility to zigzag and rotate. The carrier can also be widened to straddle medians.

HOW WAS THE ROUTE CHOSEN?

Since Endeavour could not be dismantled without breaking the delicate heat tiles that protected it during re-entry to Earth, officials at the science center decided to move it through surface streets and picked the widest boulevards. Freeways were ruled out because the shuttle is too big to pass through the underpasses. At one point during the move, Endeavour will be transferred to a special dolly and towed by a truck over Interstate 405.

HOW CAN WE VIEW?

While it's hard to miss Endeavour rolling down the street, police have limited public viewing and closed off sidewalks along the route because the shuttle's 78-foot wingspan hangs over in some places. Three public celebrations are planned Saturday including at the science center. Endeavour goes on public display Oct. 30.

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