

# 'Big Dig' Contractors Settle Suit

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BOSTON -- Contractors who worked on the long-troubled Boston Central Artery/Tunnel highway project known as the Big Dig agreed to pay about \$458 million to settle a lawsuit filed by the state over a fatal tunnel-ceiling collapse and to cover the costs of leaks and design flaws.

Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff, the consortium that oversaw design and construction of one of the nation's costliest public-works projects, has agreed to pay \$407 million, while several smaller companies will pay about \$51 million.

U.S. Attorney Michael Sullivan said in announcing the deal that Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff "grossly failed to meet their obligations and responsibilities to the citizens of Massachusetts and the United States."

Under the agreement, Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff won't face criminal charges for the Interstate 90 tunnel-ceiling collapse in 2006 that killed Milena Del Valle, 39, as she rode in a car. The accord also doesn't bar the consortium from receiving future government contracts.

A separate lawsuit filed by Ms. Del Valle's family is pending.

The agreement also allows state officials to seek additional money from Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff over the next 10 years if a future incident causes more than \$50 million in damage. Its liability would be capped at \$100 million.

John MacDonald, chairman of Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff, said in a statement that the settlement "is in the best interests of all concerned."

"We have always said that we take responsibility for our work.

We understand and acknowledge with this resolution that our performance did not meet our commitment to the public or our own expectations. Above all, we deeply regret the tragic death of Milena Del Valle in the I-90 tunnel," Mr. MacDonald said.

Mr. Sullivan said Bechtel/Parsons Brinckerhoff, which was paid more than \$2 billion to manage the project over 20 years, made \$150 million in profits. The \$14.79 billion Big Dig, which had an initial price tag in 1985 of \$2.6 billion, has been plagued by problems and cost overruns throughout the two decades it took to design and build. It replaced the elevated Central Artery that ran through the heart of Boston with a series of tunnels, ramps and bridges.