

EWEB opposes inverted payment structure

By David Brown
Of the Emerald



Price of Power

This is the second in a series of articles that looks at the Eugene Water and Electric Board and its current rate structure.

Adding to this month's increased bills, a decision is now brewing that may further influence the Eugene Water and Electric Board's electric rates.

During Thursday's meeting of the Northwest Power Planning Council, EWEB submitted written testimony opposing a proposed rate structure intended as a conservation model for all Northwest utilities. The rate structure would charge artificially low prices to residents using below average amounts of electricity and distribute the difference to residents above the consumption average.

The proposal was recommended to the NPPC by a private firm retained to study energy rates and conservation in the Northwest.

Eugene rate payers currently pay a flat rate tailored to reflect the actual cost of providing electricity to the customer, according to EWEB literature.

EWEB anticipates a decision from the NPPC on the recommendations as soon as Oct. 18, says Tom Santee, EWEB public information manager.

Under the proposal, utilities opting not to implement the rate structure would be required to prove savings comparable to those intended by the rate structure. If unable to provide that proof, utilities could be penalized with extra charges for the electricity they buy from the Bonneville Power Administration, a federal generating facility which supplies

electricity to local utilities throughout the Northwest.

"There is some question on our part as to whether the council has the authority to do this," Santee says. If so, the council's authority comes under the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Planning Act, a federal law, he says.

EWEB's testimony to the NPPC states "the burden of proof might more appropriately be placed on the Council to show that their recommended rates can, in fact, produce more conservation than combinations of existing individual utility rate design and conservation programs."

"EWEB's goals are the same as those of the Council in this regard (conservation), and EWEB has been working hard toward those goals," reads a letter to NPPC from Camilla Pratt, vice-president of the utility's board of commissioners. "Consider that the EWEB Conservation Center is bustling 10 hours a day, seven days a week, and that a full crew of energy analysts works on weekends.

If EWEB were to implement the recommended rates, 9,941 of the utility's residential electric customers would pay an average increase of \$15.72 per month. This means 4,364 customers would pay \$3.65 more per month, three customers would pay \$517.42 more and the remaining customers' increases would fall somewhere in between. EWEB keeps track of exactly how much energy each customer uses, allowing utility officials to make these projections.

These increases would subsidize the electric bills of 42,014 electric customers who consume less electricity, the estimates project.

"There is a reasonable concern that the 42,000 customers who are suddenly subsidized will turn their thermostats up a couple degrees and spend it on more energy," reads the testimony.



Photo by Mark Pynes

EWEB employees test the pressure on a Eugene water line during a recent maintenance inspection. EWEB electricity rates structures are now under scrutiny by the Northwest Power Planning Council

Under the proposal, "virtually all residents of separately metered apartments (mostly electrically heated) realize decreases of 10-30 percent, while larger electrically heated family-style homes show consistent increases," protests the testimony.

Northwest utilities have fought hard over the past few years to preserve their credibility, says the testimony. "Several years ago the region decided that a number of nuclear plants would be necessary." (The reference is to construction of five plants by the Washington Public Power Supply System.)

"The customers aren't so sure, but they start paying," continues the testimony. "More recently, a surplus is

declared. 'Maybe the energy won't ever be needed,' we say, 'but we're still going to have to ask you to pay for any dry holes.'"

Two of the WPPSS plants were put in moth balls due to financing problems. But some costs of those plants is still reflected in past and present wholesale price increases from BPA which obligated to some construction costs.

EWEB is still negotiating with BPA concerning a 1979 wholesale increase of 100 percent and a 1981 wholesale increase of 67 percent, Santee says.

The over-all theme of testimonies and negotiations might be that EWEB wants its rights to self-determination within the regional power network, he says.

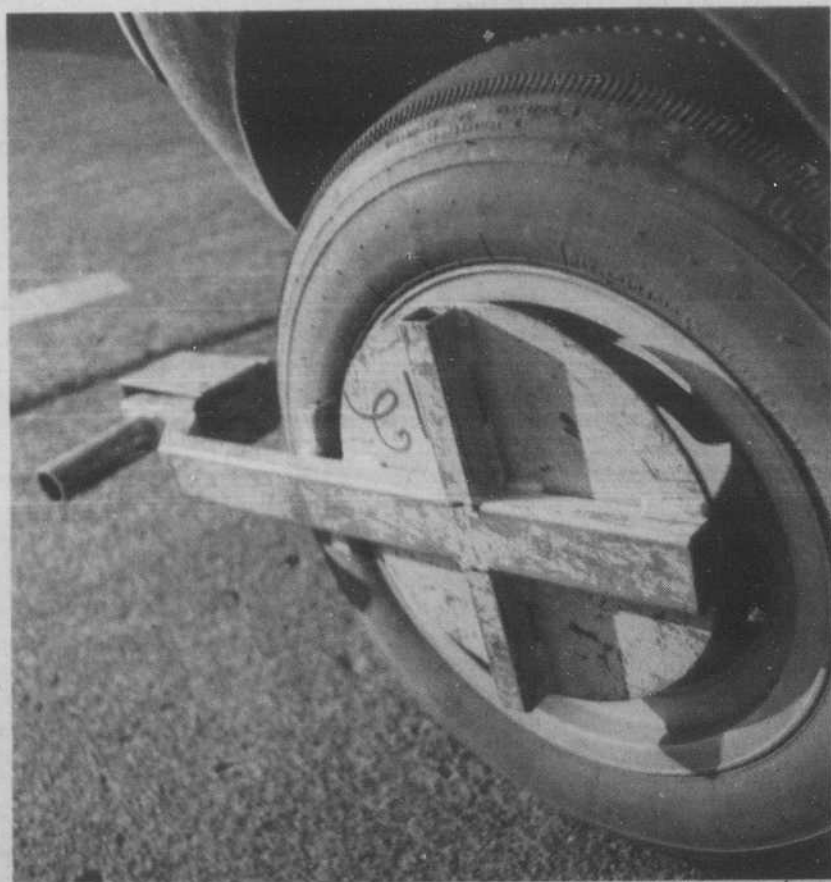


Photo by Dave Kao

"Car boots," metal frames which lock onto a car's hubcap and axle, prevent holders of delinquent parking tickets from driving away.

'Boots' stomp on unpaid fines

By Frank Shaw
Of the Emerald

After a three-month hiatus in Eugene's crackdown on unpaid parking tickets, the city has stepped up its car booting effort.

Car boots, yellow metal frames that prevent a car from moving by locking its hubcap and axle, are placed on most cars with about \$20 of unpaid parking fines, says Jim Hanks, the city traffic engineer.

Hanks says the car booting program helps force people to pay their overdue fines.

The booting program was halted three months ago because the traffic department had questions about the process of informing people about overdue fines, Hanks says.

"We'd put a ticket on someone's window," Hanks says, "and someone else would come along and take it off. Pretty soon we'd put a

boot on the car, and the car owner would have no idea what he'd done wrong."

Now, he says, the traffic department sends a letter to the person's home, informing that person of the overdue fines.

After one parking ticket the city has the legal right to boot a person's car, but they usually don't, he says.

The total amount a person must accumulate in overdue tickets before the vehicle goes on the "boot list" depends on the length of the current list, Hanks says. He estimates the minimum amount usually runs between \$15 and \$30.

Because the people who write the tickets usually are the same officials who boot the cars with overdue fines, they usually have the list memorized, Hanks says.

When a parking control officer sees a license number that's on the boot list, the of-

ficer calls city hall to find out whether the fine has been paid. If not, the boot goes on the car.

The car owner then must go to the finance department of city hall and pay the overdue tickets and fine, along with an extra \$40 fee for boot removal.

Hanks warns that people should not try to remove the boot themselves. "You can't just pretend it's not there and drive off."

"There is a plaque on the window right where the driver sits, so it's tough to miss. If you try to drive off, you not only wreck the boot but bang up your car pretty good too," he says.

Destruction of a boot constitutes destruction of city property and, depending on the boot's value, could be considered a felony, he says.

Hanks has only one warning for people with lots of parking tickets: "Watch out."

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