

# Washington considers gas tax



SEATTLE (AP) — The devastating California earthquake has renewed interest in Washington's efforts to beef up quake-sensitive bridges and freeways, a costly undertaking that may require a gas-tax increase.

The state is three years into a 20-year program to retrofit more than 1,000 bridges considered vulnerable to earthquake damage, and the question of cost still has not been resolved. Washington state engineers say they need at least \$12.5 million a year to do the work, but the Legislature has set aside only a fraction of that amount.

State Senate Transportation Committee Chairman Larry Vognild, D-Everett, said Tuesday he wouldn't be averse to putting a measure on the ballot seeking voter approval for a gasoline-tax increase to pay for seismic work. But highway officials will first have to prove the retrofitting is critical and can be done in a reasonable time, Vognild said.

It would take a 2-cent-a-gallon increase in the gasoline levy to fully pay for the retrofit program, Vognild said. Each penny increase would generate about \$27 million a year.

When told of Vognild's comments, House Transportation Committee Chairwoman Ruth Fisher said she, too, would be willing to consider using the gas tax to cover these expenses.

But like Vognild, she needs to be convinced. "There may be a need for that, but we don't know it yet. We will take a look at it," Fisher said.

Before any new tax can be passed, Initiative 601 requires a statewide public vote — providing both houses support such an increase.

State Transportation Secretary Sid Morrison has ordered his engineers to determine whether a case can be made for more money to upgrade state bridges.

"I come down on the side of giving us the resources so we won't look back and say, 'Why

didn't we make the investment?'" Morrison said.

Washington's freeway overpasses and bridges probably would hold up pretty well in a Los Angeles-size earthquake, state bridge engineers say — but only if it were one of Washington's typical 12- to 15-second temblors.

The Los Angeles-area quake measured 6.6 on the Richter scale and lasted about 30 seconds, shaking apart a number of key highway bridges.

"I think we would do very well with one of that magnitude," said Ed Henley, Department of Transportation bridge planner. "It would depend on how long it lasted."

In the past three years, the state Department of Transportation has used steel bars to reinforce many bridges on Interstates five and 405 and Washington highways 410 and 512, so they can better withstand quakes, said Myint Lwin, bridge engineer for the department.

Officials say more attention also needs to be paid to reinforcing masonry buildings, which can crumble in earthquakes, and to search-and-rescue preparedness.

Scientists say the Pacific Northwest is prime territory for a severe quake. Western Washington quakes in 1949 and 1965 each killed seven people.

"Not only can it happen here, it's inevitable," said Pat McElroy, deputy supervisor of the state Department of Natural Resources.

Unlike California quakes, which are generally caused when pieces of the Earth's crust slip horizontally along fault lines, the Northwest's great quakes have been caused by crustal plates colliding head-on, scientists say. Those plates meet 100 miles or so off the Northwest coast, from northern California to British Columbia.

A recent Department of Natural Resources report predicts earthquakes in Washington with a magnitude of 6 on the Richter scale every 10 years. Earthquakes with magnitude greater than 6 are likely to occur every 35 to 110 years, the report says.

# Oregon's structures not ready for quake

PORTLAND (AP) — An earthquake of the size that crippled Los Angeles would do even more damage in Oregon, where many of the buildings aren't as safe as those in Southern California.

"If you like what you see in Los Angeles, you will see it here in Oregon and even worse in Portland if we have a similar earthquake," said Ian Madin, Oregon state seismic hazard geologist. "Our buildings aren't as well-constructed as those in L.A."

The Los Angeles quake, measuring 6.6 on the Richter scale, killed at least 42 people and badly damaged buildings, freeways and utilities.

"What Monday's quake is telling us is that Los Angeles got off fairly lightly because they have been strengthening buildings," Madin said. "But we don't have a fraction of the strength in Portland buildings that they have in their structures."

The fault that caused the quake was a "thrust" type, meaning one side of the fault pushes up over the other side, said John Minsch, geophysicist with the National Earthquake Information Center in Golden, Colo.

Madin said dozens of active thrust faults have been identified off the Oregon Coast in recent years.

"Those faults are part of the Cascadia Subduction Zone, which itself is a very, very large thrust fault," Madin said. This zone could produce a magnitude 8 or 9 earthquake.

"When you come farther inland, there is a possibility of thrust faulting in the Willamette Valley and in the Portland area," he said.

The quake in Los Angeles did major damage to freeways that carry commerce to and from the Northwest.

Sunrise Express Inc. of Vancouver, Wash., usually dispatches 15 trucks a day from Los Angeles to the Portland area on the company's sole long-distance route. But Monday, only two trucks found paths out of earthquake-damaged Los Angeles.

"Everything is on hold," said Joe Kulavik, who owns the business. "At this point in time, we feel the emergency vehicles need those roads more than we do."

# Student dies in fall from 12th-story fire escape

CHENEY, Wash. (AP) — Eastern Washington University officials are trying to find out how a student fell 12 stories to his death from a residence hall fire escape.

Jeffrey A. Garner, 24, of Kirkland, died instantly Monday evening in the fall from the top floor of Pearce Hall, EWU spokeswoman Stephanie Pettit said Tuesday.

Police found a note and a letter at Garner's off-campus apartment that both mentioned suicide and were investigating the possibility that he killed himself, said Lt. Vic Wallace of the campus police.

"Nobody actually saw him jump, so we are afraid to say it was a suicide for sure," Wallace said.

Authorities also were trying to determine who Garner may have

been visiting and how he could have fallen from a fenced catwalk that leads to an enclosed fire escape tower, Pettit said.

"We are trying to determine if there was anyone there that he knew," Pettit said. "So far, we have not been able to find anyone."

Fencing on both sides of the catwalk is about 5-foot tall, Pettit said.

Garner was in the dormitory when a smoke alarm on the dorm's seventh floor tripped a fire alarm about 7:25 p.m. Some students using the catwalk say they passed Garner. Others on the ground saw him fall.

Garner was a sophomore who returned to classes in the winter quarter after a two-year hiatus. He was enrolled in a single class and had declared no major, Pettit said.

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