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Voters to decide on two measures altering gas tax

■ If passed, one measure adds taxes and the other uses taxes for police patrols

By Josh Ryneal
Oregon Daily Emerald

Two measures on the state ballot could change the way Oregon uses gas tax revenue, but only one would make Oregonians pay more at the pump.

Measure 82 would increase Oregon's gas tax by five cents to 29 cents a gallon. If passed, the measure would fund the construction of new roads and highways at both the state and local levels. The measure would also change the way heavy vehicles are taxed by repealing the current weight and mile taxation system and replacing it with a diesel fuel tax.

Measure 80 would not impact state or local revenues and expenditures, but would amend the Oregon Constitution and empower the state to use revenues from fuel and vehicle taxes to increase highway patrol budgets.

Supporters of Measure 82 say that \$600 million worth of vital highway construction projects would be funded by the tax increase, and truckers would be held accountable to the same tax standards as regular motorists.

Opponents allege the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), which would administer the funds raised through Measure 82, has mismanaged the money it already receives and say that small Oregon trucking companies would be hurt by the measure's passage.

Pat McCormick, spokesman for Fair Funding for Better Roads, said the tax increase would be fair for all motorists.

"Oregon funds roads with the fees from road users, and I think this is a fair way to decide who pays how much; the more you drive, the more you pay," he said.

McCormick said Oregon's total automotive taxes are the second-lowest on the West Coast, even with the increases contained in the measure.

"We have a very low registration tax and a relatively high gas tax, but when you look at the cost benefits of the measure, they are very good," he said.

Truckers would also get a fair shake, McCormick said, because their unwieldy and complicated weight and mile taxes would be replaced with a "simple" diesel tax that would be paid at the pump.

However, even supporters of the measure concede that Measure 82 will probably not pass, given currently high gas prices and Oregon's anti-tax atmosphere.

"Oregon has high gas prices, but they have nothing to do with gas taxes," McCormick said. "Twenty-nine cents a gallon is not much, and if Oregonians want better roads, an increase will be inevitable."

Becky Miller, executive assistant to Bill Sizemore, director of Oregon Taxpayers United, disagrees with the idea that ODOT will use the revenue from the measure efficiently.

"If there was real accountability in ODOT, this would be a different story," she said. "But ODOT has a reputation as a black hole, and nobody knows where the money

Gas tax measures

State Ballot Measure 80 would amend the Oregon Constitution to allow state and local governments to utilize money from the state Highway Fund to train and hire more highway patrol officers.

Supporters say that the measure would not increase taxes, but instead would allow state and local governments to use existing funds for more officers.

There is no organized opposition to this measure.

State Ballot Measure 82 would increase Oregon's gas tax by five cents to fund highway construction projects and repeal heavy trucking weight and mile taxes, replacing them with a diesel fuel tax at the pump.

Supporters say that Oregon's highways are in need of repair and extension, and this would provide funding for these projects.

Opponents say that ODOT is not accountable enough to warrant more funds, and the measure would shift the tax burden off of the heavy trucking industry and hurt small Oregon trucking companies.

goes."

Miller was also concerned with the measure's impact on small trucking businesses in Oregon, stating that small freight lines would bear the brunt of costs.

"Big companies, along with companies with exemptions, like garbage and recycling services, would pay relatively little and transfer a lot of expenses to the small guys," she said.

In contrast with Measure 82, Measure 80 would not increase state or local taxes, and has the support of Governor John Kitzhaber and former governor Victor Atiyeh.

There is no organized opposition to the measure, which would allow state and local governments to appropriate money from the ODOT Highway Fund to hire and train more highway patrol officers.

Glen Rader Jr., director of Citizens For Safe Streets, Roads and Highways, said that nothing in the measure states that the money has to be used at any time.

If the measure passes, state and local governments would be able to request more funds for their budgets from the Highway Fund, something that is currently not allowed under the Oregon Constitution.

According to Rader, there is plenty of money left in the fund to provide this service to taxpayers.

"There is \$1.5 billion flowing into the Highway Fund every year, and I think that there is \$125 million of that left over after all the construction and improvements have been made," he said.

Lloyd Clodfelter, president of the Help Our Troopers organization, said that part of the reason he supports this measure is to help out what he considers severely understaffed policing agencies. Clodfelter said that there are not enough officers to keep highways safe and to provide enough backup for other officers making dangerous stops.

"In 1980, we had about 650 officers on the highway patrol until the legislature took their budget provisions out of the Highway Fund," he said. "Now, we are down to around 350 and that's not enough to protect either motorists or other officers."

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