



Oregon Department of Transportation photo

Highway 204 reopened at about 12:30 p.m. Sunday after being closed at about 5 p.m. Saturday after heavy snowfall and strong winds caused trees and branches to collapse and fall on to the highway.

Tollgate Highway reopens after closure

■ Heavy snowfall, strong winds cause trees, branches to collapse and fall on to highway

Observer staff

The Tollgate Highway was closed for much of the weekend due to fallen trees.

Highway 204 reopened at about 12:30 p.m. Sunday after being closed at about 5 p.m. Saturday after heavy snowfall and strong winds caused trees and branches to collapse and fall on to the highway. The closure ex-

tended for all 37 miles of Highway 204 from a few miles west of Elgin at Summerville and Highway 204 west to Weston. ODOT crews then began working to remove between 100 and 150 downed trees and trimming others, said ODOT Spokesman Tom Strandberg.

By 9 a.m. Sunday the situation had improved to the point

that the closure was reduced to the stretch of highway running 14 miles from Summerville Road and Highway 204 west to the Spout Springs ski area.

As of 8 p.m. Sunday, shoulder closures were still in effect on Highway 204 from milepost 27 to 30, a stretch that runs about 14 to 17 miles west of Elgin. The closed shoulders, which hold debris from trees that were cut up, have been marked with cones for safety.

Standberg said that what happened this weekend occurs every few years on Highway 204 at the end of October or in November.

He said, though, that it is unusual for it to happen this early in the fall.

He said Highway 204 is vulnerable to fallen trees because there are so many trees close to the highway.

"There is not a buffer (between Tollgate Highway and the trees)," he said.

LIBRARIES

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aylee Orton and Isaac Insko; two Union students, Jakob Graffunder and Paul Reed; and two Imbler students, seventh-graders Isabella Warg and Tayler Bowles.

Foltz said he welcomed the chance to do the woodwork.

"I enjoy woodworking," he said. "I like keeping busy."

He also said that the process of working with wood is a bit more forgiving than working with other materials because if there is an imperfection like a nick it can often be corrected simply by sanding it down.

Orton voiced a similar sentiment.

"It is really fun," she said, noting that she enjoys working with her hands on projects.

The Little Free Libraries project is being sponsored by Red Roof Construction of Elgin, the Edward Jones investment and financial advising company and the Literacy Alliance, a local organization that promotes reading.

Red Roof Construction provided all of the materials for the libraries. Edward Jones furnished food for the volunteers who worked Saturday and will provide plaques that will be attached to the bookcases recognizing those who built them. Briana Tanaka and Shawn Magnum have been participating in the project helping on behalf of Edward Jones. Tanaka was among those who did woodwork at LHS.

After being painted and having recognition plaques attached, the new Little Free Libraries will be filled with books from the Literacy Alliance. Next they will be installed in La Grande,

Imbler and Union. In La Grande, the libraries will be installed at Central Elementary School and at parks. The sites in Union and Imbler have not yet been determined.

Carpenter said that people are good about returning books to Little Free Libraries or replacing the books they took with others.

"I have not seen an empty one yet," Carpenter said. "The book fairies keep filling them up."

In an age when many are doing their reading via the internet, Carpenter is glad efforts are being made to get books into the hands of more children. He believes that reading an actual book has advantages over reading online. One is that there are fewer distractions and another is that a book can provide more opportunities for reading together.

He said parents are more likely to read actual books with children than digital versions but are unlikely to do so via computers. "Reading a book can be a shared experience," Carpenter said.

Another plus of books, Carpenter said, is that illustrations and other artwork are easier to see than they are on an electronic device.

J.D. Cant, Imbler High School's agricultural science teacher and FFA adviser, also assisted at Saturday's workshop, helping Imbler FFA students build Free Little Libraries.

"I love this idea," Cant said. "It is a sharing of knowledge and it uses the honor system. I think it is great."

Contact Dick Mason at 541-786-5386 or dmason@lagrandeobserver.com. Follow Dick on Twitter @lgoMason.

Do I really need to get a passport?

If you don't fly, work at a nuclear power plant or need access to secure federal facilities, you don't need identification that complies with the federal Real ID Act. But if you plan on flying — domestic or international — in the latter part of 2020, you should probably think about getting a passport.

At least that's what Transportation Security Administration and the Oregon Department of Transportation advise travelers to do ahead of what is expected to be a wave of Oregon drivers lining up to get new identification when it becomes available in July.

While some passport offices are equipped to handle a higher volume of applications, such as those within the Portland area, others are bracing for growing pains in expectation of more Oregonians seeking to acquire their passport.

Marion County Clerk Bill Burgess said he's not overly worried about an influx of

passport seekers in his district because the office already saw a huge throng of Marion County residents seeking passports after the 2016 election who were worried about their ability to visit family members in Central and South America. Nearly all of the staff members in Burgess' office are trained to process passport applications.

"After (President) Trump was inaugurated, a lot of families were worrying how they would stay together and get across the border if they were U.S. citizens," Burgess said. "Our passport business more than quadrupled."

Burgess believes his office will be ready, but he warns Marion County residents not to wait. If they plan to fly in October of next year, you really should submit your application around June 2020. "Think about it this way: A passport makes a great graduation gift," Burgess said.

Outside of county offices,

some cities have their own passport services within city hall. Lake Oswego, for example, has staff trained to accept passport applications. The city even offers photo services for a small fee.

One tip offered by Lake Oswego Administrative Support Assistant Chloe Busch: U.S. passport cards (\$65 with fees), which offer entry into Mexico and Canada, comply with Real ID standards and are less expensive than a standard U.S. passport book.

Busch said that during the past few weeks nearly everyone she has helped to comply with Real ID standards, instead of waiting in line at the DMV next summer. She's pitched those looking to fly domestically on purchasing the passport card to save a few bucks, especially if they're purchasing for a family.

NEW LICENSE WILL COST \$20 MORE

Oregonians seeking to

get a new Real ID-compliant driver license next year will need to bring some extra documentation — and a bit more money.

The regulation requires those seeking identification to provide at a minimum documentation showing full legal name, date of birth, Social Security number, two proofs of address of principal residence and lawful status. Oregonians are only required to show proof of legal citizenship or legal presence, full legal name and current address to acquire a license.

If you choose to get a Real ID-compliant Oregon driver's license in July — adorned with a star in the top-right corner — it will cost an additional \$20 on top of the standard fee to help the state pay for implementing the changes.

Residents will be able to obtain Real ID-compliant licenses beginning July 6, 2020.

REAL ID

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facilities across the country. Air travel requirements were rolled out beginning Jan. 22, 2018.

Ahead of the deadline, most states began changing their systems, which included implementation of massive new data servers to keep identification information secure. The system was used to instantly verify documentation, such as birth certificates, passports, Social Security numbers and residential addresses.

Driver and Motor Vehicles Services spokesman David House said Real ID compliance continued to come up in Oregon's legislative process each year. One obstacle to the state's participation was technology. The Oregon Department of Transportation system

was running on millions of lines of primitive code inside an old mainframe computer. House said it could have been updated to handle the new info required for Real ID compliance, but the half-century-old system "is simply incompatible with modern technology."

In 2015, ODOT began updating its information system. Two years later, the Legislature approved a bill to authorize Real ID compliance. Instead of starting a new information technology project to become compliant, the state signed a \$69.4 million contract with Colorado's Fast Enterprises, which also handled system changes for Massachusetts and Minnesota, to tack on creation of a new driver information system to ODOT's project already underway.

"I think what really pushed Oregon is watching other states successfully

roll out their new systems for compliance," House said.

According to House, Oregon and many other states likely saved money by delaying compliance with the Real ID Act of 2005 because when the first deadline rolled around in 2008, data storage systems were much more expensive. Legislative staff reports filed with SB 536 in 2009 show that Congress estimated it would cost states around \$3.9 billion, or about \$78 million per state in 2005 dollars.

Technology, particularly in the realm of security, has vastly improved during the past decade, according to House. There are still no hard numbers on how much Oregon and others might have saved by the delay, he said.

Only Oklahoma, New Jersey and Oregon have yet to comply with Real ID standards.

BOND

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be rejected by voters, Wells said, the matching grant would no longer be available to the school district. He said, though, that district would be able to continue to reapply for the bond.

The superintendent said his school district is seeking a bond only because it was given the Oregon School Capital Improvement grant.

"The only reason we are doing this is because we received the grant. It is a tremendous deal," Wells said.

The Oregon School Capital Improvement matching program became available to school districts about six years ago. School districts have been able to apply for the grant three times a year since then, which is what Wells said his school district has done.

Projects the bond levy would cover include, safety improvements at all schools, including secure entries and key card systems for better access control; energy efficiency improvements at all schools, including upgrading the heating and ventilation systems; improvements to accommodate grades seven to 12 at Union High School; improvements to the district gymnasium and athletic complex; and improvements to the district's S.E. Miller and J.F. Hutchinson grade school buildings to accommodate students in kindergarten

through sixth grade.

A portion of the money from the bond would go toward making the high school and its gym more handicapped accessible. This would make it easier for people with mobility issues to attend graduation in the gym and for all students to be able to easily reach the top floor of the high school, said Macey Clark, chair of Citizens for Union Education, a community group campaigning for the passage of Measure 31-98.

The upgrades the bond would cover are needed primary because of the age of the Union School District's buildings, Wells said. The high school was built in 1912 and the Hutchinson building in the late 1920s or early 1930s. In the 1950s, the Miller building and the high school gym were constructed.

Clark said she believes many people in the community understand that the school district's buildings are old and need to be renovated. She said many people have visited the school district's buildings and have seen the need for upgrades. Clark said they also appreciate how critical good facilities are for students.

"They understand the importance of a good learning environment for students," she said.

Clark also noted that in recent years voters in Imbler, La Grande and North Powder have passed bond levies in

their school districts with rates all significantly higher than the \$1.10 per \$1,000 of assessed property value rate Union property owners would pay. The rates for the levies approved in those school districts over the past nine years was \$1.99 per \$1,000 of assessed property in La Grande, \$2.01 in North Powder and \$2.35 in Imbler.

Clark said the school district and the bond's supporters understand that it might not be easy to pay higher taxes but, she added, "We want people to know we are fiscally responsible."

Clark spoke as if the district does not have a choice.

"We could make it another 20 years, but we could not make it another 50 years without these improvements," she said.

Clark said some people have asked why the school district does not replace its aging school buildings with new ones. She said this would not be feasible since it would cost almost \$20 million.

"That is a lot of money to ask for in taxes," she said.

Tours of the district's buildings will be given from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Oct. 31, a non-school day when parent-teacher conferences will be conducted. People will be able to see what improvements money from the bond would help pay for during the tours.

"We hope that people go on the tours before they vote," Clark said.

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