

What \$1 trillion building plan means for rural Oregon

By **PETER WONG**
and **SIERRA DAWN McCLAIN**

PORTLAND — President Joe Biden led a political pep rally April 21 at Portland International Airport, a site he called “a perfect example” of what the \$1 trillion legislation he signed last year can do to overhaul the nation’s aging infrastructure.

The airport is already undergoing a \$2 billion modernization project, including a greatly expanded passenger terminal and a new mass timber roof that will be its crown jewel. The airport already has benefited from \$19 million in federal funds for runway work. Biden said the infrastructure package earmarks another \$25 billion for U.S. airports.

“There is a belief that we can’t do big things anymore,” Biden said. “But we can. We have proven we can. We must build a better America. A good place to start is right here in Portland.”

The president was speaking to a crowd of elected officials and union workers inside a hangar at the Air National

Guard base on the airport’s southern edge.

During their speeches, some members of Oregon’s congressional delegation talked about other big projects besides airports that could benefit from the new federal money — including replacement bridges across the Columbia River connecting Portland and Vancouver, Wash., and widening Interstate 5 at the Rose Quarter interchange with Interstate 84.

Biden made few specific commitments, but Oregon is expected bring in about \$5 billion over the next five years in infrastructure dollars.

What about outside Portland? What specific investments might rural communities see?

One potential area of investment is at the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay. During the event, U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, along with U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, said they are hopeful that federal infrastructure dollars will turn the site into a major international port to



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

President Joe Biden speaks about the infrastructure law in Portland.

relieve long-term congestion and boost trade.

The president made no commitment but said he recognized the congressmen “have been fighting for (improving the capacity of that port) for a long time.”

“And, you know, the investment all across Oregon is going to continue, like was mentioned earlier, by Coos Bay. You know, we’ve delivered nearly \$33 million in January to modernize the main jetty, making it safer and more efficient for ships, boaters and fishermen,” said Biden.

On water projects, many

specifics are still to be determined as water managers and governments apply for competitive grants. A few projects, however, have been named.

The law will provide \$2.7 million in three major water infrastructure projects in Oregon.

The first investment is in the East Fork Irrigation District Modernization Project near Hood River. Funds will go toward the design of high-priority laterals and the Dukes Valley Canal.

The second investment is in the Tumalo Irrigation District Modernization Project

near Bend. It will modernize up to 1.9 miles of Tumalo Irrigation District’s canals and 66.9 miles of laterals by converting open irrigation ditches into closed pipe systems.

The third grant will be used to modernize water conveyance systems in the Owyhee Irrigation District in southeastern Oregon.

The package, Biden said, also includes dollars “to help prevent and respond to fires like the thousands that burned ... half a million acres across Oregon last year.”

He didn’t name the dollar amount Oregon will get for fire mitigation efforts, but USDA as a whole is slated to receive \$3 billion over the next five years to reduce the risk of wildland fires.

Biden said Oregon will also see dollars go toward helping rural communities deal with floods, drought and the strengthening of electrical transmission lines.

At least \$1.2 billion is for road and bridge repairs, mass transit and other alternatives to reduce carbon emissions from cars and increase infrastruc-

ture for electric vehicles. Most of this money is channeled through the state Department of Transportation, but some goes directly to local governments. The breakdown of how much of that money will go to rural versus urban projects is yet to be determined.

Biden said the infrastructure law will also deliver \$100 million to Oregon “to make high-speed internet affordable and available everywhere in the state — urban, suburban, and rural.”

The infrastructure package is so enormous that Biden called this era the “Infrastructure Decade.”

In response to critics who say the massive package will intensify inflation, Biden blamed rising prices on supply-chain problems exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. He also linked gas price increases to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and worldwide sanctions against Russia.

Peter Wong reports for the Oregon Capital Bureau. Sierra Dawn McClain reports for the Capital Press.

Dairy groups want more action on supply-chain disruptions

By **CAROL RYAN DUMAS**
Capital Press

The National Milk Producers Federation and U.S. Dairy Export Council are calling for better interagency collaboration to increase port capacity, incentivize carriers to load export cargo and strengthen transparency throughout the supply chain.

In a letter to USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack and Department of Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, the groups said they are grateful for the agencies’ efforts to address ocean freight transportation issues and recommended additional action be taken.

They recommended USDA resume the publication of the Ocean Shipping Container Availability Report — known by the acronym OSCAR — a weekly snapshot of the availability and location of containers at ports and other intermodal facilities. USDA discontinued the report a few years ago.

“Container availability has been one of the leading challenges that American agriculture producers have faced with respect to the export of their goods to foreign markets. The OSCAR reports would be a valuable resource that would have significant benefits for shippers of dairy and other agriculture producers, among other stakeholders,” the groups said.

They also suggested two operational recommendations with respect to container availability.

The first is real-time tracking of containers as a component of the new



Getty Images

Two dairy organizations are suggesting ways the federal government can expedite agricultural exports.

Freight Logistics Optimization Works initiative, which can allow more in-depth awareness of the location and availability of containers.

That would require coordination with ocean carriers, but tracking would enable the resumption of the OSCAR reports and better enable access to containers for export purposes, they said.

The other operational recommendation is to enable “dual turns” of containers, wherein containers delivering imports to an inland location may be provided directly to an export-focused shipper, rather than being sent back empty to the port.

“This can increase container and supply chain efficiency, enable greater access to containers for exporters, reduce fuel use and reduce shipping costs for a variety of stakeholders,” they said.

That effort could be undertaken through pilot projects with carriers and could be supported through USDA’s Commodity Credit Corporation resources dedicated to supply-chain challenges.

They also asked the agencies to implement “fast

lanes” that incentivize the flow of agricultural exports into and from ports.

That would include trucking lanes at port terminals that are dedicated to the expeditious delivery of perishable agriculture goods to ports and prevent those laden trucks from getting delayed in long port terminals trucking lines.

“This should also include incentives for ocean carriers to load more export containers, instead of empty containers, and which could include preferred or prioritized berthing access to accelerate the vessels’ exit from anchorage and a speedier departure from the port,” they said.

They also asked for more “pop-up” facilities like those in Oakland and Seattle, which have enabled greater access to containers and improved the ability to secure vessel accommodations.

“As valuable as they have been, these pop-up yards are distant from many inland food production locations, requiring additional trucking and trans-loading activities that can be costly and extremely challenging to secure,” they said.

Yakima River Basin’s snowpacks rally like ‘crazy’

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Snowpacks that melt into Yakima River reservoirs in Central Washington have gone from lackluster to stellar this month, raising the possibility that irrigators with junior rights will receive full water supplies after all.

The Upper Yakima Basin snowpack was 104% of normal Thursday, compared to 81% two weeks ago. The Naches Basin snowpack was 93% of average, compared to 83% a fortnight ago.

“It’s been a real rally. It’s crazy,” Bureau of Reclamation river operations engineer Chris Lynch said.

The bureau forecast in early April that irrigators with junior-water rights would receive 94% of their full allotments. With snowpacks swelling, irrigators may not even face that small cutback. The bureau will update its outlook in May.

“The forecast probably will go up,” Lynch said. “That’s a pretty easy guess.”

“Will it go up to 100%? It very well could,” he said.

The bureau manages five reservoirs and a system that supplies water to irrigate about 464,000 acres in south-central Washington. Irrigators with junior rights are cut back equally in water-short years.

At the end of a dry March, the trend was toward tightening water supplies. Then came April.



Getty Images

The Yakima River. The Upper Yakima Basin snowpack was 104% of normal April 21.

By April 21, precipitation at the five reservoirs already was 122% of normal for the entire month.

Lynch cautioned that if temperatures warm up, the bigger snowpacks could melt too soon. “You can lose it just as quick as you gained it,” he said. “The temperatures are very important this time of year.”

The National Weather Service’s Climate Prediction Center on Wednesday predicted that Central Washington will have below-average temperatures and above-average precipitation for the next eight to 14 days.

Looking farther ahead, the climate center predicted equal chances for above- or below-average temperatures and precipitation for all of Washington in May.

Snowpacks in most basins in Washington have gone from below normal to above normal in the past two weeks.

On Thursday, the U.S.

Drought Monitor decreased the percentage of Washington in “extreme drought” to about 7% from almost 10% the week before. About half the state — the eastern half — is some some level of drought.

The extreme drought touches parts of Adams, Benton, Grant, Kittitas, Lincoln and Yakima counties.

The region will need three times its normal rainfall over the next three months to get completely out of a precipitation deficit, according to the National Centers for Environmental Information. The centers calculate the odds of that happening at less than 1%.

Washington State Assistant Climatologist Karin Bumbaco said soil moisture, stream flows and temperatures also will figure into the severity of the region’s drought. “I still think there can be some improvement,” she said.

Farm to pay \$125,000 to Ecology

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

A Franklin County, Wash., farm has agreed to pay the state Department of Ecology \$125,000 to settle allegations it illegally irrigated 250 acres of sweet corn and peas last summer.

Ecology initially fined Frank Tiegs LLC \$304,000. The farm doesn’t admit any wrongdoing, but doesn’t want to spend more time or money appealing, according to a settlement filed April 20 with the Pollution Control Hearings Board.

In the settlement, Ecology doesn’t take back any of the allegations. Ecology said in a statement April 21 that the farm cooperated with the department and has been authorized to irrigate the 250 acres in 2022.

Ecology alleged Tiegs illegally irrigated from the Snake River’s McNary Pool. The department estimated the farm illegally irrigated for a

total of 152 days.

In its appeal, the farm said it had adequate water rights, mostly because it fallowed other ground and that it had temporarily transferred water rights to Ecology for stream flows.

Tiegs reasserted April 21 that his farm was unfairly penalized.

“Ecology refused to meet and discuss any of these mitigating factors and instead just hit us with an unjustifiably,

ridiculously high penalty,” he said in a statement.

“So what Ecology is calling ‘illegal irrigation’ and irrigating ‘without a water right,’ we think is more fairly described as ‘irrigating without advance approval to add the acreage to existing rights sufficient to cover the usage.’”

“That being said, we are glad to put this issue behind us,” he said.

The fine will go to the state general fund.

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