

Opinion / Local

— GUEST OPINION —

Dust or pavement, taxes or not

By Rep. Cliff Bentz

We are losing our paved streets and roads.

Between 20 and 50 percent of the streets and roads in many of our cities and counties are in “poor” or “very poor” condition.

When asphalt reaches these conditions, it has to be replaced-at a cost of about \$200,000 to \$300,000 per mile, twice what it would have cost had it been appropriately cared for.

Obviously, we should be preventing our roads and streets still in “good” and “fair” condition from transitioning into the “poor” category, but we are not.

Instead, we are letting our good roads wear out (counties and cities are financially able to chip-coat only about a third of what they should maintain each year) while we fight the losing battle of patching patches on bad roads.

Where are we going to find the \$200,000 to \$300,000 per mile to replace our hundreds of miles of roads already “lost?”

Or, for that matter, the \$30,000 per mile it takes, every sixth or seventh year, to chip coat and preserve our good roads?

So, should we be paying more for the use of our roads?

That discussion must start with an understanding of how much the average Oregonian now pays for that use.

Fortunately, most of the tax that we pay at the pump to the government is transparent.

For example, the cost of state gas tax, registration fees, and titles fees totals about 44.2 cents per gallon-30 cents of which is state gas tax.

The average Oregon driver drives 10,234 miles per year, so if her car gets 20 miles per gallon, she pays about \$153.51 a year in state gas tax.

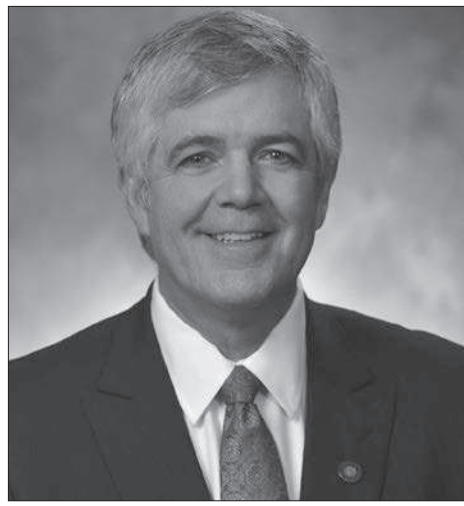
If the state gas tax were to go up by one penny, she would pay about 43 cents more per month.

There are several other government organizations which raise money for roads, such as local road districts and the federal government, but the purpose of this editorial is to highlight two things: first, how much the average Oregonian pays in state gas tax, and second, despite what we are currently paying, our roads and bridges are failing.

A future editorial will focus on the hidden and damaging impact Oregon carbon legislation is having and will have on the price of fuel and our ability to use the gas tax to save our transportation systems.

About half of any new state gas tax is sent back to Oregon’s cities and counties.

The other half goes to the Oregon Department of Transportation.



Submitted Photo

Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) is an Assistant Republican Leader in the House, and has served in the Oregon Legislative Assembly since 2008. In addition to his role as Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation & Modernization, he is also the Vice-Chair of the Revenue Committee, and sits on the Transportation & Economic Development Committee, Energy and Environment Committee, the Joint Committee on Department of Energy Oversight, and the Legislative Counsel Committee, as well as on various work groups and task forces.

This money is constitutionally dedicated to roads. Not to mass transit. Not to State Police. Not to any other non-road related use.

Three-quarters, more or less, of the gas tax is paid by those on the West side of the state, so a large part of what is needed for maintenance of Eastern Oregon’s state highways comes from the Willamette Valley.

Said another way, the cost of maintaining the thousands of essential miles of state highway in Eastern Oregon vastly exceeds what we in Eastern Oregon pay in state gas tax.

So, if you raise the gas tax or registration and title fees statewide, you are assuring that there will be money to bring from West to East to repair the state highways we use almost every day.

Every conversation about needing more money for road maintenance must address increases in the cost of road repair materials.

For example, the cost of oil needed for asphalt has gone up, since just 2004, by almost 270 percent.

Compare this 270 percent increase to the state gas tax, which, in 24 years was only raised once, by six cents (24 percent).

Not only that, the cost of labor, gravel, and cement has also gone up by 50-75 percent.

As co-vice chair of the Interim Legislative Committee charged with addressing, in the 2017 legislative session set to begin in February, preservation of our road systems, what you think about these issues is important to me.

If you think that we should continue to “use up” our roads and bridges, rather than paying necessary maintenance as we go, please tell me.

Or, if you think that we should pay a higher gas tax, or higher registration or title fees, knowing that this money must be used for our roads and bridges, please say so.

I need to hear from you.

OTEC sets up Main Street Christmas tree

On Saturday, November 19, through the crisp mountain wind and first white snowflakes of winter, OTEC volunteers bundled up warm, pulled on their hard hats, grabbed their gloves and – working alongside multiple community partners – helped secure and safely deliver the annual downtown Christmas tree in Baker City.

“It looks like a regular tree up until the crews begin securing, measuring and lifting it onto the tow truck,” said OTEC’s Manager of Communications Lara Petitioner-Stokes. “It takes weeks of preparation and partnering with our community leadership for this annual event to run smoothly.”

“Once it’s in the air, you truly begin to see how all of the logistical puzzle pieces fit into place and realize that you are working with an object that weighs 3,176 pounds and reaches into the air 35’ feet,” said Petitioner-Stokes. “It’s quite the sight to see and very exciting to watch our crews and community part-

ners in action doing what they do best.”

OTEC volunteers and crews were also out visiting schools in Elgin and Prairie City over the weekend to help with local construction projects.

“What was really appealing about volunteering for this Elgin High School construction project was that it was for a house the construction students actually built themselves,” said OTEC’s Working Foreman Dan Patton. “Kudos to the shop teacher that put this project together encouraging their students to build an entire house. It has value to the kids because these are real world applications that will serve them well moving forward in their lives.”

“One of the core principles of the cooperative businesses model is ‘Concern for Community’, and Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative takes that seriously,” said Petitioner-Stokes. “Contributing to the communities we serve in a variety of ways. For OTEC, as a non-

profit electric cooperative, service means more than providing low cost, reliable electricity to our members. It means volunteering and getting involved when we can and, of course, as time and budgets permit.”

OTEC regularly helps with projects that require the cooperative’s specialized equipment, including hanging banners and holiday lights for local communities and replacing arena lights for county fairs.

Additionally, OTEC helps local business and homeowners through its energy programs, providing hundreds of thousands of dollars in energy-efficiency savings every year.

“These are just a few of the many fantastic events OTEC partners in each year,” said Petitioner-Stokes. “But, the tree cutting has to be one of my personal favorites. It rings in the start of the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday season and makes you feel like a kid again.”

Poetry comes to Halfway

Join award winning poet Carl Adamshick for a poetry workshop and reading at 6:30pm on November 30th at Crossroads Carnegie Art Center 2020 Auburn Ave. Baker City and December 1st at the Halfway Public Library 260 Grover Lane, Halfway at 1 p.m.

Attendees are encouraged to bring their own poems to be recorded as part of the Oregon Poetic Voices Project. Recognizing the need for poetry in our lives, the Oregon Poetic Voices Project has collected and digitally ar-

chived thousands of poetry readings from across the state of Oregon.

Carl Adamshick is the co-founder of Tavern Books. He is the 2010 winner of the Walt Whitman Award and the William Stafford poet-in-residence at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, OR. His work has been published in Narrative, American Poetry Review, Tin House, The Harvard Review and elsewhere.

For more information visit oregonpoeticvoices.org.

Funding for this program is provided by the Libraries of Eastern Oregon (LEO) through an ArtPlace America grant. LEO is a nonprofit organization that serves libraries in its 15-county service area with programs, online services, and advocacy. Funding from the ArtPlace America grant aims to provide arts-based programming at libraries through various hands-on workshops, presentations, and art exhibits for patrons of all ages.

OSP urges safe travels

With at least 10 people losing their lives on state highways over the past week, OSP is urging motorists to travel safely this Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend. Other traffic advisories to motorists are winter travel conditions, Black Friday shopping and the Civil War Game in Corvallis.

Thanksgiving Holiday Weekend - This holiday period (Wednesday through Sunday) will see one of the highest volumes of traffic in over a decade according to AAA Oregon/Idaho.

As with other holiday weekends OSP is urging motorists to plan ahead, expect heavy traffic,

expect poor driving conditions with rain expected at lower elevations and snow in the mountain passes, and take your time (more traveling tips at the bottom of this release).

Know the road conditions before traveling by going to www.tripcheck.com required by visiting tripcheck.com.

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