

Labor applauds Clackamas County's effort to fund Sellwood Bridge project

Organized labor applauded the Clackamas County Board of Commissioners' unanimous vote Dec. 9 to increase vehicle registration fees by \$5 in order to pay for its share of the cost of replacing the crumbling Sellwood Bridge.

Union officials scoffed at some opponents of the fee hike, who have begun a petition drive to refer it to Clackamas County voters. Some residents also have hinted at starting a recall campaign against some of the commissioners.

"We support our elected officials who are acting in good faith to do the right thing," said John Mohlis, executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council, pointing to the 85-year-old bridge's poor "sufficiency rating" of 2 out of a possible score of 100, and the pressing need for construction jobs.

"We want to see this project move forward," Mohlis added. "We ask union members not to sign any petition that would slow this project or put it at risk."

Construction is set to begin in July

2012, with a new bridge opening in 2016.

The Clackamas County auto registration fee doesn't go into effect Jan. 1, 2012, and will be capped at \$22 million. A side resolution requires the money to be used only for replacing the bridge itself, while also calling for "locally sourced" labor and materials.

The county vehicle registration fee is allowed under the Jobs and Transportation Act (House Bill 2011) that was passed during the 2009 Legislature.

Multnomah County already approved a \$19 annual vehicle registration fee to raise its \$127 million share of the project — which is estimated at \$290 million to \$330 million, depending on what is done to the interchange on the west side of the bridge. The city of Portland has committed up to \$100 million, the Oregon Department of Transportation \$30 million, with additional money coming from the Federal Highway Administration.

The Sellwood Bridge sits in the city of Portland in Multnomah County

— about one mile from Clackamas County. The bridge serves as a vital connection over the Willamette River, and is the only connection in the 12-mile stretch from Oregon City to Portland. Of the 30,000 cars that cross the bridge every day, 21,000 of them (72 percent) are going to or coming from Clackamas County.

Commission Chair Lynn Peterson put safety and jobs at the top of the list of her reasons for supporting the vehicle registration hike.

"We are all concerned about the safety of the bridge and we are all concerned about using our money wisely," she said. "We are also responsible for ensuring a safe transportation system, and citizens have the right to feel safe as they travel in Clackamas

County and throughout the region."

In response to concerns from some that Clackamas County shouldn't have to help pay for a bridge in a different county, Commissioner Jim Bernard listed several ways in which Multnomah County and all Oregon citizens help fund needed programs and services available in Clackamas County.

"I hope our citizens don't have to use some of these services," he said, "but if they do, we have schools, courts, drug and alcohol abuse prevention, jails and lots of other programs that we can't afford to pay for on our own."

"Aside from the urgent need to replace the bridge for safety reasons, there is also an opportunity to spur the county's economy both immediately

with the construction phase and into the future by providing a viable transportation path into prime undeveloped commercial and industrial property in the county," said Paul Riggs, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council.

Riggs was among several union members who testified in favor of the registration fee hike over the course of three public hearings held by the Clackamas County Board.

Opponents involved in the petition drive must collect 6,252 signatures of registered voters (4 percent of Clackamas County voters in the November election) by March 10 in order to have the issue placed on the May 2011 special election ballot.

Cowlitz Tribe closer to building new casino

VANCOUVER — The Department of the Interior's approval last month of the Cowlitz Tribe's application to take 152 acres in Clark County into trust was good news for Portland area construction unions.

That's because back in 2005 the Cowlitz Tribe signed a project labor agreement with the Columbia Pacific Building Trades Council assuring that the project would be built union. But before work could begin, the tribe had to get approval from several government agencies. The Interior Department's announcement Dec. 27 cleared a major hurdle in that quest.

Six years ago, the Cowlitz, which gained federal recognition as a tribe in

2000, planned to spend \$510 million building a 134,000-square-foot casino, a 250-room hotel, restaurant, convention and entertainment center at the La Center exit off Interstate 5 — which is about 16 miles north of the Interstate Bridge. Construction alone was expected to create some 4,000 jobs, with an annual payroll of \$185 million. The complex projected employing 3,000 workers.

The scope of the project has been scaled back due to the poor economy. Instead, the tribe says it will build in phases, starting with the casino and 5,000-seat convention venue that can be used for music and entertainment.

"This project will allow the

Cowlitz Tribe to create hundreds of jobs and invest in other forms of economic development. It will also allow the tribe to begin the restoration of its homelands," Larry Echo Hawk, assistant secretary-Indian affairs at the Department of Interior, said in a press release.

Cowlitz Tribe Chairman William Iyall said barring further legal delays, construction will start as soon as the tribe secures financing. Construction is expected to take two years.

The tribe has partnered with the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut, which runs gambling operations on the East Coast.

'Solution to Resolution' topic of LERA breakfast

"The Solution to Resolution" will be the topic of discussion at the Jan. 25 breakfast program sponsored by the Oregon Labor Employment Relations Association. Labor attorney Mike Tedesco and management attorney Todd Lyon will answer questions and offer advice on how to prepare each side for a final settlement.

The breakfast begins at 7:30 a.m. at Clackamas Community College in Wilsonville, 29353 Town Center Loop East. Cost is \$35 — \$25 if you pay for a membership to LERA.

Questions and registrations can be directed by e-mail to info@oregonlera.org, or call Jim Bailey at 503-819-4071.

LERA is an organization that brings labor, management, neutrals and academics together to improve labor-management relations.

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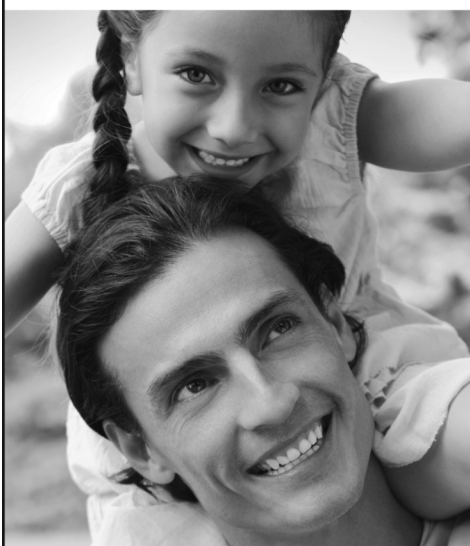
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