

Building trades lobby in support of ConnectOregon V

SALEM — Oregon building trades unions were well represented at a July 17 public hearing conducted by the Oregon Transportation Commission in regard to project recommendations for ConnectOregon V.

ConnectOregon is a lottery-bond-based initiative first approved by the Oregon Legislature in 2005 to improve transportation connections (other than highway and bridge work) by investing in air, rail, marine/ports and transit infrastructure. It is overseen by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

In the previous four rounds, the Legislature approved \$340 million to fund 146 projects. That investment leveraged approximately \$499 million of non-ConnectOregon funds and created thousands of construction jobs throughout the state.

In 2013, the Oregon Legislature approved a fifth authorization of \$42 million for ConnectOregon. That legislation includes for the first time bicycle/pedestrian projects as also eligible for funding.

ODOT received 104 applications seeking \$124 million in funding. After a lengthy review process by regional committees, in June the list was narrowed down to 37 projects and forwarded to the Oregon Transportation

Commission. The commission will make a final decision regarding project funding at its Aug. 21-22 meeting in Ontario, Oregon.

Three projects that made the short list stirred up environmental groups, who say the projects will make it easier to transport coal and oil through the state. Environmental groups turned out a large contingent to the public hearing to argue against the projects. They were countered by a similarly large group of members from construction unions and others who spoke for the need of more family-wage jobs. The three contested projects are:

- The Port of St. Helens applied for a \$2 million grant to be used to rebuild Berth 2-Beaver Dock at Port Westward on the Columbia River. The dock is owned by the Port and will continue to be operated as a common-user port facility. The ConnectOregon grant will leverage an additional \$3 million from Pacific Transloading LLC. The Ambre Energy subsidiary has entered into a terminal services option with the Port for non-exclusive use of the dock. The Australian company is seeking permits to ship coal from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming and Montana to Asia. Ambre has a memorandum of under-



Russ Garnett, business manager of Roofers Local 49, talks to State Rep. Brad Witt in the hallway of the Salem Convention Center, site of a public hearing by the Oregon Transportation Commission regarding ConnectOregon V project funding recommendations.

standing with the Columbia Pacific Building and Construction Trades Council to perform all the work with union labor. PGE also has rights to the dock, and Columbia Pacific Bio-Refinery, an existing Port tenant, also uses the dock to ship liquid bulk commodities by barge. This project will enable additional uses and users of the dock that require mooring deep-draft

vessels.

- The Port of St. Helens applied for a second grant, also for \$2 million. The project will expand the berthing capabilities of the Port Westward dock by constructing new mooring and installing pipeline rack supports. The improvements will extend the dock and create a berth (named Berth 1) capable of handling deep-draft Panamax tankers. The grant will leverage an ad-

ditional \$4,623,000 from Columbia Pacific Bio-Refinery.

- The City of Rainier applied for nearly \$3 million to reconstruct a portion of rail facilities where track runs down the middle of "A" Street in the City of Rainier. The project will improve safety by providing roadway-track separations, closing existing crossings, and upgrading remaining crossings and signaling. The grant will leverage an additional \$2,294,566 from Portland & Western Railroad, the City of Rainier, ODOT Rail Division, and Oregon Regional Solutions.

In testimony before the Oregon Transportation Commission in support of the "A" Street safety project, State Rep. Brad Witt (D-Dist. 31) urged commissioners to judge the validity of each of the projects on their own merits.

"Many of my constituents have voiced opposition to the projects based solely on the likely end-users of these facilities," said Witt, who is a union rep for United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555. "An improved dock facility is every bit as capable of enhancing the export of Oregon wines, green-certified Oregon wood products or Oregon-grown fruits, vegetables and meat products — along with a host of Oregon commodities, as it would be for coal."

Several other elected officials, including Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose), whose district includes the port, and Columbia County Commissioner Tony Hyde, also spoke in favor of the projects.

Other projects on the recommended list include money for a TriMet west side bike and ride; for Terminal 6 at the Port of Portland; for runway improvements at Redmond Airport; and for a bicycle-pedestrian bridge and a Franklin Blvd. transit station for Lane Transit District in Eugene.

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