

Temporary gas tax the smart, responsible plan for Portland

Nick Sawie is the executive director of ROSE Community Development. Maxine Fitzpatrick is the executive director of Portland Community Reinvestment Initiatives, Inc. Eli Spevak is the founder of Orange Splot LLC.

BY NICK SAUVIE, MAXINE FITZPATRICK AND ELI SPEVAK
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNISTS

Imagine you're a single parent in Portland. You're stringing together paychecks to keep up with your exorbitant rent at the apartment complex on the edge of town, the only one you can afford. Despite your best efforts to save money, you're vulnerable to any unexpected economic turmoil. Heading home from your overtime shift, you hit a pothole on that beat-up street you drive every day, and you find out that the repair to your car will cost almost an entire month's rent. You don't know how you're going to be able to take transit to your job the next morning, especially since your child can't independently walk to school on the dangerous roads lacking crosswalks that lie between your apartment and the elementary school.

How did we get to this point? Years of declining revenues leads to the chronic underinvestment of the basic functions and services of city government, and the lack of funding has significant implications to a region's economic vitality, public health and livability. The negative impacts of this chronic underfunding leads to disproportionate burden faced by marginalized populations located literally and figuratively on the margins of our community. Now, community leaders are building a coalition to support a measure to raise revenue to address the immediate backlogged community need, and are bringing business and community advocate groups together to take a first step at addressing the problem.

For Street Roots' readers who have been following Portland's ongoing affordable housing shortage, all of this probably sounds very familiar. Yet it also describes the current state of Portland's roads, streets and sidewalks. That's why the three of us, each affordable housing advocates, encourage Portland to vote YES on 26-173 and pass a temporary, four year, 10-cent gas tax to raise \$64 million for street improvements next month.

Our gas taxes, the primary source of transportation funding, have not produced

revenues to keep up with the required maintenance to our streets. This is for a variety of reasons, including inflation, increased fuel-efficiency in vehicles, and reduced per-capita driving. While we've patiently waited for the federal and state governments to increase their gas taxes (which they haven't done since 1993 and 2009, respectively), Portland's streets have continued to deteriorate. An independent report conducted by the City Club of Portland last year confirmed that we simply have not allocated enough money for Portland to address the glaring lack of maintenance. According to city estimates, every dollar we spend on maintenance now can save as many as 10 down the road by avoiding costly road rebuilds. Portland's low-income communities are disproportionately burdened by poor maintenance on our streets; many families can't stomach paying \$500 for a broken axle caused by a pothole (and if you hit a pothole while biking, it costs even more to fix a broken collarbone).

In addition to our maintenance concerns, Portland's streets desperately need basic infrastructure improvements to make it easier for every Portlander to walk and bike on their local neighborhood street. Community advocates including APANO, Families for Safe Streets, OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, and Oregon Walks have been working with the City to adopt Vision Zero, the philosophy that traffic fatalities are unacceptable and that cities should use engineering, policy and education campaigns to eradicate the notion that streets must kill people. Traffic violence, not unlike the violence of homelessness, disproportionately targets the vulnerable, including individuals with substance abuse and mental illness. A disproportionate number of Portland's traffic fatalities happen in East Portland. The combination of high speeds, underfunded crosswalks and large numbers of students and senior citizens navigating potholes and puddles around speeding cars and trucks creates an all-too-often lethal combination in our underserved communities.

The temporary gas tax also includes \$8 million in funding for increased sidewalks,

crosswalks and traffic calming near elementary and middle schools. The rates of walking and biking to school have gone up 36 percent since the City of Portland began their Safe Routes to School program a decade ago, and the Fix Our Streets proposal would direct funds to neighborhoods that need it the most. With PPS families concerned about transportation logistics due to the forthcoming school boundary changes and Portlanders citywide concerned about the number of children without safe routes to school in East Portland, the temporary gas tax couldn't come at a better time for Portland's children.

The \$64 million raised by the gas tax would be spent on already-identified projects, including safety improvements for drivers and walkers alike on 122nd Avenue, crosswalks on the Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway, and repaving parts of Foster Boulevard. Revenues received by the temporary gas tax would be reviewed by an independent citizen advisory committee reporting annually to City Council to ensure accountability and transparency. Check our website at www.fixourstreetsportland.com for a full list of projects, endorsements, and other information about the campaign. Our only organized opposition to the campaign is funded by the Oil Lobby.

Undeniably, Portland urgently needs to address our ongoing affordability concerns, so that everyone can find a home in a safe, walkable neighborhood. The Fix Our Streets Portland proposal directly addresses these concerns by making cost-efficient, equitable investments on the streets and in the neighborhoods that need them the most.

The temporary gas tax is a smart, fair, cost-effective investment to ensure the longevity and safety of our transportation system. Affordable housing advocates, environmentalists, business advocacy groups, and Portland's entire City Council and top mayoral candidates all agree that this gas tax is a necessary first step to avoid costly road repairs in the future and to help stem traffic violence in East Portland. Please vote yes for safer streets this May; we can't afford to wait any longer to fix our streets.



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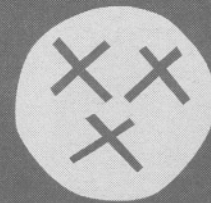
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