

Continued from Front Page

ODOT Funding Fight Not Settled - Not Over

expansion projects.

Almost immediately after the bill passed, a coalition of citizen groups, small business owners, and transportation skeptics launched a referendum campaign. Their argument was not centered on a single tax increase but on broader concerns about affordability, accountability, and the cumulative burden of state fees during a period of economic uncertainty.

By late December, organizers reported collecting roughly 200,000 signatures — well above the threshold required to refer a bill to the ballot under Oregon law. Those signatures are now undergoing verification by the Oregon Secretary of State. During that process, the law's tax and fee provisions are paused, preventing the state from collecting the new revenue until verification is complete and, if the measure qualifies, until after a statewide vote.

That pause has immediate and longer-term consequences.

Budget planners had expected the new revenues to begin flowing early in 2026, allowing ODOT to stabilize its

finances and begin planning multi-year work programs with more certainty. With the referendum in play, those funds are now in limbo. ODOT has confirmed it will continue operating under existing revenue streams, but officials acknowledge that uncertainty complicates everything from contract timing to staffing decisions.

While routine maintenance and safety work will continue, larger capital projects are more difficult to commit to when revenue timing is unclear. Contractors, engineers, and local partners often require firm funding assurances months or years in advance. A delayed or overturned funding plan could force projects to be rescheduled, scaled back, or shelved entirely.

The effects are especially pronounced in rural Oregon. Outside major metropolitan areas, state highways serve as critical links for agriculture, forestry, tourism, and freight. Many rural communities rely on ODOT for road maintenance they cannot afford locally. County public works departments had already begun planning around anticipated



funding increases, reallocating crews and equipment in expectation of a more stable state program.

Local officials say even short delays can ripple outward. Pavement preservation postponed for a year often costs significantly more later. Bridge repairs deferred too long can escalate into full replacements. In coastal and mountain regions, weather-related damage compounds quickly when maintenance schedules slip.

Beyond operations, the funding fight has exposed deeper structural issues in Oregon's transportation system. Fuel taxes, long the backbone of highway funding, have failed to keep pace with inflation,

Continued on Page 15

BEAVER CREEK UNIQUE

A cartoon illustration of a beaver with a large, bushy tail, holding a very large nut. Next to the beaver is a small motorcycle. The background is a simple landscape with a blue sky and yellow ground.

416 W "B" St, Drain Oregon
Russ & Charlotte Kaleese
541 228-6044 541 914-9973

A circular logo with the text "PRECISION LUBE & TUNE" and "DC" in the center. The background of the ad shows a road winding through a forest.

4 Locally Owned Locations
165 S Main St • Myrtle Creek (541) 860-1040
1440 NW Garden Valley Blvd #108 • Roseburg (541) 492-5823
377 NW Garden Valley Blvd • Roseburg (541) 440-6788
489 E Central Ave • Sutherlin (541) 459-0428

Make The Right Decision
Come To Precision

• Free Vehicle Inspections • Unbeatable Tire Prices
• Full Service Automotive Repairs
• One Stop Automotive Shop

\$15 OFF
ANY FULL SERVICE
OIL CHANGE
EXP 12-31-25

38 SPECIAL CAFE NOW OPEN
NEW OWNER
GREAT FOOD NEW MENUS

The logo for 38 Special Cafe features two crossed pistols in a circle with the text "38 SPECIAL CAFE", "SINCE 2025", and "GATEWAY TO THE PACIFIC". Next to it is a photograph of a plate of food, including a piece of salmon, vegetables, and a dessert.

CLASSIC DINER SERVING BREAKFAST, LUNCH AND DINNER
OPEN 7 DAYS A WEEK 6 AM - 10PM. (541) 804-2233
439 W B AVE, DRAIN, OR 97435