

# THE DAILY ASTORIAN

Founded in 1873



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## On transportation, reform before taxes

*Other states recognize urban and rural areas are fundamentally different*

Oregon's lawmakers are busily working on proposals to find more money to improve the state's system of roads and other transportation infrastructure. Under consideration are funding mechanisms such as a new carbon tax, an increase in the gas tax and even a tax that motorists would pay for each mile driven.

Gov. Kate Brown and others want the Legislature to pass a comprehensive funding package after the 2016 elections.

The need is there. Traffic congestion is growing in cities while roads and bridges are deteriorating in rural areas. The bill for years of neglect and incompetence has come due.

But before state leaders dig deeper into the pockets of citizens and businesses, we should ask ourselves whether the root problem is a lack of money or mismanagement.

David Bragdon, the former president of Metro, makes a compelling case that our transportation problems are the result of an antiquated governance structure and a lack of accountability by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

Among the points Bragdon made at a recent conference in Portland:

- Oregon's formula for distributing highway fund dollars directs half to ODOT when cities and counties own 80 percent of the state's streets and highways. "It's treated like an annuity; an entitlement."

- The muddled layers of government defy accountability. Bragdon compared this inefficient transportation governance "mash-up" to the state's criminal justice system, where each level of government specializes.

- Mismanagement at the transportation department has jeopardized the whole system of transportation funding. Bragdon

## Beware shipping fuel through towns

An alarming accident in Portland Sunday illustrates the risks of shipping large quantities of petroleum products through heavily populated areas.

A collision between a tractor trailer and a train carrying liquid asphalt through an industrial area near St. Johns Bridge resulted in the truck driver's death and closed U.S. Highway 30 from early morning until around midnight. It put firefighters in danger and released vast amounts of black smoke, though air-quality standards are said to have been unaffected. Monetary damages are certain to be in the millions.

Still, it all could have been much worse. The accident occurred a distance from the Willamette River. The rail tank cars were parked on a side track, not the Portland & Western Railroad's main line. The tanks did not suffer a catastrophic rupture.

This was, in a sense, a success story and the railroad wasn't at fault.

points to the excessive use of debt by Oregon's highway division. Because of this "35 percent of state transportation revenues go to debt service to bondholders rather than to projects." In 2001, the figure was 2 percent.

Bragdon cited several states that have put transportation reform ahead of new taxes. Leaders in these states "recognized that urban and rural areas have fundamentally different transportation needs." They also recognized that regional decision-making and funding "produced better value than sending tax money to the state capital and hoping it would come back to their area for something useful."

As a result, states like California and Pennsylvania and cities like Denver and Los Angeles are setting the pace for improving transportation. In Oregon, Brandon says, "the debate now is not about improving things, but about whether we can keep things from getting worse."

David Bragdon has done a great service by stating in stark terms the root problems of Oregon's transportation crisis. His recipe for changing state funding allocations and management are spot on.

Before Sen. Betsy Johnson, Rep. Debby Boone and Rep. Brad Witt consider new transportation taxes, they should listen to Bragdon's call for reform.

*Bragdon's remarks to the City Club of Portland can be viewed on YouTube at <https://youtu.be/Pk1rW5S-SSA>*

However, it highlights one of the many ways in which transporting hydrocarbons through urban areas and along waterways can go wrong.

Despite plunging oil prices at present, Tesoro is pushing ahead with the nation's largest crude-by-rail terminal in Vancouver, Washington, built to move crude oil from North Dakota to West Coast refineries.

Brett VandenHeuvel, executive director of Columbia Riverkeeper, noted "Had the tanker train contained explosive Bakken crude, the explosion could have been devastating to Portland." And even without an explosion, a major oil leak into the Willamette or Columbia would be awful.

The Washington Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council must bear all this in mind before deciding on the Tesoro plan. Saying yes will embed oil train risks in Pacific Northwest neighborhoods for generations to come.

# Grant funding helps 'the panicked pedestrian'

Visitors to Seaside will now have an added path to safety with the addition of "you are here" signs.

The site-specific tsunami evacuation maps are oriented with arrows to indicate the way to high ground, rather than providing a north-south orientation.

"One of the things that keep me awake at night as the county emergency manager are the visitors," Clatsop County's Emergency Manager Tiffany Brown said in November.

In preparing the maps, she said, "I just kept my audience in mind: the panicked pedestrian. And it just made sense to me you shouldn't have to spend time orienting yourself, so for that reason, all of the signs are oriented to the viewer."

The path to high ground is different at each sign location.

### Stakeholders meet

The idea for the new signs was formulated at a emergency management meeting last year at Camp Rilea which brought Clatsop County's Emergency Management team, the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, homeowners' associations and city officials together.

Seaside's planning director Kevin Cupples was among the group, and agreed to bring the new signs to Seaside.

"What came up is people don't really have an idea of where high ground is," Cupples said at a recent meeting of the Seaside Downtown Development Association. "In Seaside, if they're a visitor, it's difficult to explain where you need to go other than to point up to the upper hills."

A \$9,000 grant in 2014 paid for the first two "you are here" signs, along with tents, maps, card keys and other materials. This year, the county received a \$10,360 grant solely for the signs.

Daniel Stoelb, geographic information systems coordinator with the Oregon Office of Emergency Management, is the "unsung hero" of this project, Brown said.

"When I discovered that DOGAMI no longer produced the signs and that no template existed, he took it on," she said. "It took us a couple months just to iron out the process, but once done, things went pretty smoothly."

Stoelb created a new sign template to match the signs installed the previous year, and drafted signs for the cities of Seaside, Cannon Beach, Gearhart, Warrenton, Astoria, Camp Rilea, the U.S. Coast Guard station and Seaside School District.

Alejandro Bancke, GIS coordinator with Clatsop County, recently completed the remaining sign drafts for State Parks, Surf Pines, Camp Rilea, Arch



R.J. Marx/The Daily Astorian

Seaside Planning Director Kevin Cupples discusses plans to provide emergency evacuation information in Seaside.

## SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

BY R.J. MARX



**'I just kept my audience in mind: the panicked pedestrian.'**

Tiffany Brown  
Clatsop County emergency manager

Cape, Cullaby Lake and Astoria School District. Brown said the signs, at about \$49 each, have been ordered but are yet to be installed.

### Signs in Seaside

Fifteen signs are now in Seaside. "Out of the 86 signs in the county, we got a pretty good-size chunk of them," Cupples said. "We tried to focus on high-traffic areas in town that would give people an idea of knowing where they're at."

Signs are designed to lead evacuees over the First Avenue bridge rather than the Avenue A or Broadway bridge, which are likely to collapse in a quake.

Making the signs accessible is essential to their success, Cupples said. "If you're waiting till the earth stops

### VIEW THE MAPS

Visit <http://bit.ly/1QpdXDK> to get a good look at the tsunami evacuation maps.

shaking to find out where your evacuation map is, you've kind of waited too long," he said. "If people aren't thinking catastrophically they'll think, 'I'll just go on my phone.' You probably won't have cell service after a Cascadia Subduction earthquake."

Once visitors are safely to high ground, officials will look to getting them out of the region as quickly as possible. Supplies would be insufficient to provide for long-term sheltering, Cupples said.

### Too much information?

Brown said evacuation road signs are still lacking in Seaside, and will be part of upcoming discussions.

"We're going to round out the evacuation-sign system in the county in the next three years," Brown said. "The next phase after we get the rest of these signs installed will be to convene the group and say, 'We need a round evacuation sign here, we need an arrow here. I need this here.' We'll be starting that after the first of the year."

Some Seaside business owners worry that too much emergency information could scare visitors off.

Education is "part of a process we need to work on," City Manager Mark Winstanley said. "I hear the complaints from businesspeople. But I think the better information we get out there, the better people are prepared. People need to be comfortable with what they need to do."

R.J. Marx is *The Daily Astorian's* South County reporter and editor of the *Seaside Signal* and *Cannon Beach Gazette*.

## Climate change hope from Paris

By PAUL KRUGMAN  
*New York Times News Service*

Did the Paris climate accord save civilization? Maybe.

That may not sound like a ringing endorsement, but it's actually the best climate news we've had in a very long time.

This agreement could still follow the path of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, which seemed like a big deal but ended up being completely ineffectual. But there have been important changes in the world since then, which may finally have created the preconditions for action on global warming before it's too late.

Until very recently there were two huge roadblocks in the way of any kind of global deal on climate: China's soaring consumption of coal, and the implacable opposition of America's Republican Party. The first seemed to mean that global greenhouse emissions would rise inexorably no matter what wealthy countries did, while the second meant that the biggest of those wealthy countries was unable to make credible promises, and hence unable to lead.

But there have been important changes on both fronts. On one side, there is a visible shift in Chinese attitudes — or at any rate, a shift that would be visible if the smog weren't so thick. Seriously, China faces a huge air quality crisis, brought on largely by coal-burning, which makes it far more willing to wean itself from the worst form of fossil fuel consumption. And China's economic growth — real income per capita has quadrupled since 1997 — also means that it has a rapidly growing middle class that demands a higher quality of life, including air that's

relatively safe to breathe.

So China is playing a very different role now than it did in the past. One indicator: Some of the usual suspects on the right have suddenly changed their line. They used to argue that U.S. emission limits would be useless, because China would just keep polluting; now they're starting to argue that U.S. action isn't necessary, because China will cut coal consumption whatever we do.

Which brings us to the U.S. Republican attitudes haven't changed, except for the worse: The GOP is spiraling ever deeper into a black hole of denial and anti-science conspiracy theorizing. The game-changing news is that this may not matter as much as we thought.

It's true that America can't take broad-based action on climate without new legislation, and that won't happen as long as Republicans retain a lock on the House. But President Barack Obama has moved to limit emissions from power plants — a big part of the solution we need — through executive action. And this move has already had the effect of restoring U.S. climate credibility abroad, letting Obama take a leading role in Paris.

Still, what reason is there to believe that the accord will really change the world's trajectory? Nations have agreed both to emission targets and to regular review of their success or failure in meeting those targets, but there are no penalties other than censure for countries that fail to deliver.

And achieving those emission targets would definitely hurt some powerful special interests, since it would mean leaving most of the world's remaining fossil fuels in the ground, nev-



Paul Krugman

er to be burned. So what will stop the fossil fuel industry from buying enough politicians to turn the accord into a dead letter?

The answer, I'd suggest, is that new technology has fundamentally changed the rules.

Many people still seem to believe that renewable energy is hippie-dippy stuff, not a serious part of our future. Either that, or they have bought into propaganda that portrays it as some kind of liberal boondoggle (Solyndra! Benghazi! Death panels!) The reality, however, is that costs of solar and wind power have fallen dramatically, to the point where they are close to competitive with fossil fuels even without special incentives — and progress on energy storage has made their prospects even better. Renewable energy has also become a big employer, much bigger these days than the coal industry.

The climate revolution has two big implications. The first is that the cost of sharp emission reductions will be much less than even optimists used to assume — dire warnings from the right used to be mostly nonsense, but now they're complete nonsense. The second is that given a moderate boost — the kind that the Paris accord could provide — renewable energy could quickly give rise to new interest groups with a positive stake in saving the planet, offering an offset to the Kochs and suchlike.

Of course, it could easily go all wrong. President Ted Cruz or President Marco Rubio might scuttle the whole deal, and by the time we get another chance to do something about climate it could be too late.

But it doesn't have to happen. I don't think it's naive to suggest that what came out of Paris gives us real reason to hope in an area where hope has been all too scarce. Maybe we're not doomed after all.

**Maybe we're not doomed after all.**