



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

Guests listen to a presentation about transportation during an event Tuesday at the Barbey Maritime Center.

Transportation: 'We have a number of obstacles in front of us'

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as director of the Port of Portland. The agency announced earlier this month that Wyatt would retire in June. In his entourage was deputy executive director and heir apparent Curtis Robinhold.

Choke point

On Monday night in Tillamook, Wyatt said, he heard from two brothers — a trucker and a farmer, both members of the Tillamook County Creamery Association — who need to get goods to the creamery's processing facility in Boardman. The focus of their complaints about transportation was not on fixing problems in Tillamook County, he said, but on the gridlock in Portland. Wyatt said he's heard similar concerns from shippers in the Willamette Valley and other regions, all stymied by gridlock in the state's largest metropolitan area.

"As a legislator 30 years ago, that's not something I would have heard here or anywhere else in nonurban Oregon," he said.

Wyatt said Oregon has ignored transportation for too long and is falling behind California and Washington state, which have made significant, tax-funded investments in infrastructure.

"If we do nothing in Oregon this year, the state of Idaho will spend more on road system improvements than Oregon will," he said. "And ... Idaho's a state that's about 10 percent our size."

Wyatt said the possibility of a big transportation package only comes along about once every decade, but that Gov. Kate Brown's administration has broached the possibility this year. Oregon has revenue challenges and a projected budget shortfall, but lagging infrastructure, he said, is a weight around the ankles



Danny Miller/The Daily Astorian

State Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, listens to Port of Portland Executive Director Bill Wyatt speak during an event on transportation.

of the regional economy.

"That's a big message from me to you," Wyatt said. "Tax increases aren't any fun. It's a big challenge to be sure. But if we don't continue to make some progress on this front, we're just going to get behind."

'Get to yes'

State Sen. Betsy Johnson explained efforts to pass a large transportation bill amid an estimated \$1.8 billion budget shortfall and the voter rejection of a sales tax measure in November that would have raised an estimated \$3 billion a year in new revenue.

Johnson helped pass what she called the state's last major transportation package, the Jobs and Transportation Act in 2009, and is part of the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization, a collection of 14 legislators trying to pass another package this year.

"We probably have, con-

servatively, \$20 billion worth of unfulfillable expectations," Johnson, D-Scappoose, said of all the transportation requests she's heard in meetings around the state.

Gas tax increases have failed nine times, Johnson said, and there is a more emboldened environmental community such as cyclists, electric car-drivers and pedestrians who don't contribute to the transportation budget through gas taxes but want a bigger piece of the budget.

"I remain cautiously — I won't say optimistic — cautiously encouraged that we will be able to do something," she said. "But we have a number of obstacles in front of us."

"And the message that I have been sharing with whatever group I get to appear in front of is you all have constituencies that you go back and associate your views, and your politics and your activism with. Tell everybody to get their 'get to yes' face on."

Tax reform: Gov. Brown laid out several new taxes to address the state's revenue shortfall

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has largely distanced herself from the push for revenue reform since the failure of Measure 97, which she endorsed. In her proposed budget last month, Brown laid out several new taxes to address the state's revenue shortfall but excluded any that would raise business taxes.

"She has seven taxes we're supposed to vote on individually, but basically, long-term she's thinking 2018," Courtney said. "This also complicates this long-term perfect fix" that some lawmakers are pursuing.

In an email to the EO Media Group/Pamplin Media Group Capital Bureau, Chris Pair, a spokesman for Brown, did not address the governor's preference for timing in revenue reform.

"The cuts proposed put

into human terms the devastating consequences families face with a tax system that is unstable, inadequate, and fundamentally out of balance to meet Oregon's essential needs," Pair wrote in the email. "While Gov. Brown will continue working hard to make sure state government does more with less, she maintains that we must work to develop a long-term solution that doesn't put Oregonians at risk every two years."

"Gov. Brown looks forward to working with legislators, business leaders and advocates to come together on these tough choices and build a budget and revenue package that keeps the doors of opportunity open for all Oregonians."

Kotek said this year is the best time for lawmakers to reform the revenue system.

"I don't want to wait until '18 because we might be deal-

ing with a whole different set of problems ... because of what the federal government decides to do," Kotek said. "There is a lot of unknowns on the horizon."

If public unions, business leaders and lawmakers aren't serious about negotiating a solution to the revenue system this year, then "we have to move on and stick to deadlines," Kotek said. Lawmakers could look at just making a combination of cuts and small tax increases to address the revenue shortfall.

"The next month or so we have a window of opportunity to talk about something bigger, and it's something to be up to other Oregonians besides us trying to push them to come to the table," Kotek said.

The Capital Bureau is a collaboration between EO Media Group and Pamplin Media Group.

Timber suit: Forest products industry averages \$13 billion in yearly sales

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action item Monday, but took no action. The Seaside School District also took no action and will remain in the claim.

Views on lawsuit

While Port commissioners and Jewell School Board members made no comment about their decisions, the college's meeting, lasting less than 10 minutes in front of a packed crowd, included a roundtable presentation for board members to share their views on the lawsuit.

Board member Anne Teaford-Cantor, who voted to opt out, said she had originally been for staying in the lawsuit, but changed her opinion after an earlier executive session, during which the college board met with Linn County Commissioner Roger Nyquist and the county's lawyer in the case, John DiLorenzo.

"I think that the money (for a settlement) would have to come from somewhere, and I also base this on 20 years of experience in and around the legal profession," Cantor said. "The expectations for how much we might get out of (a settlement) are high."

Fiscal responsibilities

Board members Karen Burke, Robert Duehmig and Chairwoman Rosemary Baker-Monaghan, who voted to stay in, said their primary fiscal responsibilities are to make the best decision for the college and its students.

"I don't think that if we were to opt out that it would make any difference in whether the suit would go forward or not," Burke said.

Baker-Monaghan, who has a background in the forest industry, said her opin-

ions on forest management don't matter to the case. Based on public input received, she said, it could be difficult for the college to pass a bond, increase tuition or support the foundation if the suit prevails and the college passed up on a settlement.

Board member Patrick Wingard ran off a slew of facts about the forest products industry, which he said averages \$13 billion in yearly sales and comprises 11 percent of the state's economic output.

"I, too, feel it's my responsibility to the college, to the students, to our staff, to the institution, to the community, to ensure we make the best decisions that are in our fiscal health," he said. "I feel that decision is to opt out."

Board member Tessa Scheller said the lawsuit is about increased timber harvests instead of helping students. A vote to opt out, she said, respects ongoing education and public discourse around the forest's greatest permanent value, while the lawsuit could result in an even bigger budget deficit than the state already faces.

"What I see as the biggest problem is the very twisted coupling of education and state forestry practices and policies, much like the state lottery being coupled to parks and watershed protections," she said. "Gambling advocates can disingenuously argue that gambling does good things, when in fact it's a social problem disguised as a sin tax. Funding for education and forest policy deserve to be evaluated on their separate merits."

Board member Esther Moberg was not present, but submitted a vote to opt out via email.

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