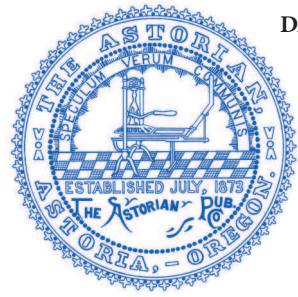


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OUR VIEW

Bill may build bridges across partisan divide

There's no reason a large-scale transportation plan cannot be bipartisan. We can all benefit from an improved transportation system — if it's equitable to all who pay for it.

For years, agreement on transportation and infrastructure has lacked at the state level, and for much longer at the federal level. It's an example of partisan bickering that's come to dominate our political atmosphere.

But state legislators are trying to change that with an expansive 10-year transportation plan that has previously eluded them. A similar, but far less expensive bill was rounding third and headed for home in 2015 when the road was pulled out from under it. The now much-derided Columbia River Crossing had plenty to do with that collapse.

This time it may be different. Lawmakers last week rolled out a 298-page draft of an \$8.2 billion plan, and many of its proposed projects and funding mechanisms have already passed through a more stringent and public process than its predecessors — which is the way it should be — especially given its price tag compared to the \$343 million proposed in 2015. Those on both sides of the aisle, and nonpartisans who have been involved, say lessons were learned in the last go-round and those hurdles have been hopped. They say it would be paid for with a combination of hikes in the gas tax and registration and license fees, tolls, new taxes on payroll, vehicle dealers and adult bicycle purchases.

Obviously, deeper vetting of the bill is needed and is now underway. It's critical because an unusual caveat of the plan is that it could be repealed in its entirety if voters successfully challenge even one of its provisions.

"The logic is that this is a package," said state Sen. Lee Beyer, D-Springfield, the co-chairman of the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Maintenance. "If you pull one string, the whole things comes apart."

The plan's key cogs are upgrades in Portland. But to convince a majority of legislators — who don't represent Portland — supporters of transportation improvements are touting the city's huge impact on the statewide economy.

Bob Russell, vice president of the Oregon Trucking Association, told The Daily Astorian transit time through Portland isn't reliable and negatively impacts every business in the state — including our region — that needs to move goods through Oregon's largest city. It also impacts visitors who try to get here using the choke points along U.S. Highway 101 and the two highways connecting to Portland.

The initial bill lists a number of earmarked projects outside of Portland, although it's troubling that none are on the North Coast.

But state Sen. Betsy Johnson, co-chairwoman of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development, said the package, although concerning in its lack of coastal projects, shouldn't be taken as a done deal. "Don't let yourself get trapped into thinking this is 'x,'" she said. "There are going to be tons of amendments."

Johnson said she has subscribed to the idea that helping ease congestion in the Portland metro area will help businesses from the Oregon Coast to Eastern Oregon move products easier.

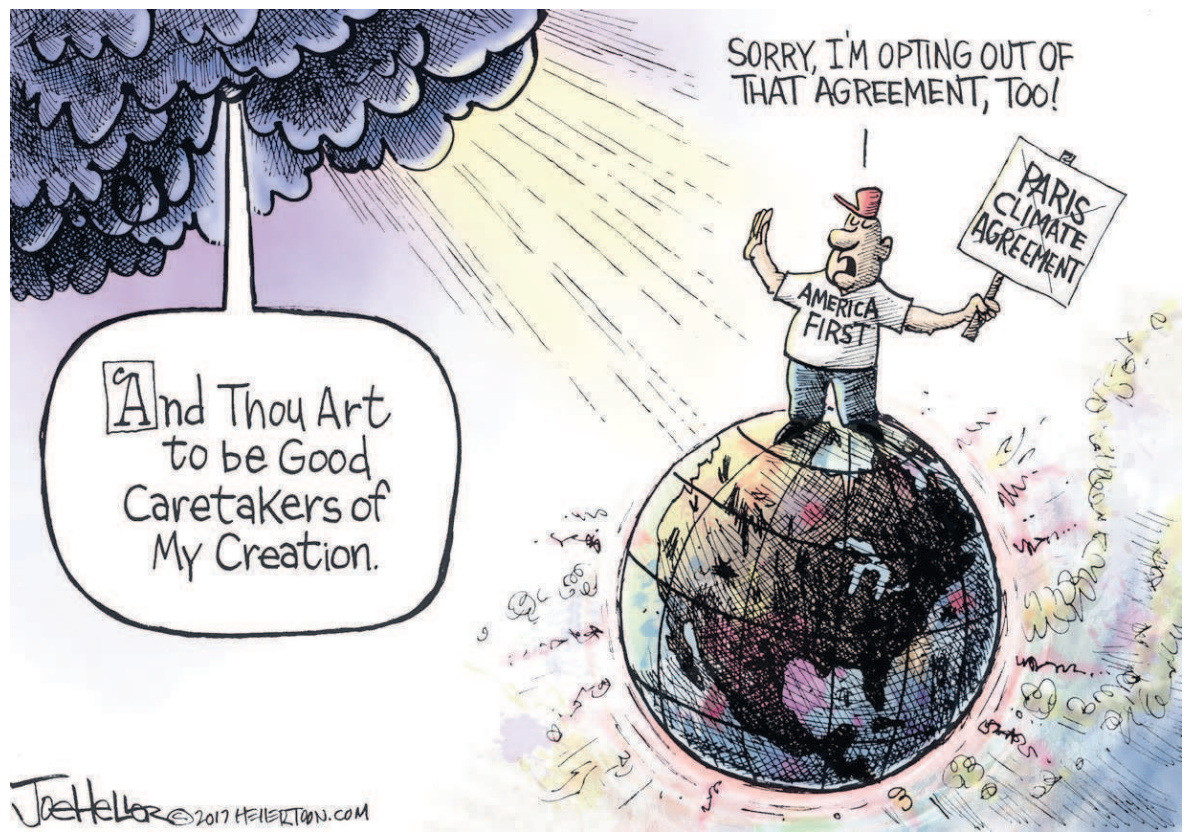
And under the state's method of dividing revenue, portions of some of the tax money generated will go to the state's counties and cities. That could translate into increased dollars for our cities' and county's road budgets, the airport and the Port. The bill tasks the Oregon Transportation Commission with prioritizing proposed projects not already earmarked.

Public hearings began Monday, and a vote on the House floor could come by mid-month.

If the bill is properly vetted — and it must be — it is one issue that does not just benefit one political party, or one demographic, nor pushes one group forward while another falls behind. A solid transportation plan can move us all forward, and this could be the one if it proves equitable to all.



AP Photo/Don Ryan
Early morning traffic at a standstill along Interstate 5 headed into Portland in January. State lawmakers are hopeful about passing a transportation package this year.



Joe Heller © 2017 HELLER.COM

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

Cannon Beach Academy remains a moving target



Brenna Visser/The Daily Astorian

This building at 3781 S. Hemlock housed the Cannon Beach Children's Center until last spring.

By R.J. MARX
The Daily Astorian

Ever have this dream? You're a young student, you have all your schoolbooks, you're ready for the first day of school. It is almost time for class. The first period bell is approaching, your classmates and teachers are waiting and then the alarm goes off, you have no idea where you're supposed to be headed.



For students and families at the new Cannon Beach Academy, the anxiety is real, but can be resolved. The Cannon Beach Children's Center closed in April 2016. With a forecast of substantially higher construction costs director of startup operations Phil Simmons said the building at 3781 S. Hemlock is more suitable than the proposed Sunset Boulevard location, which previously housed a fitness center.

"We were going to outgrow the building on Sunset," Simmons said this spring. "In the (former) children's center, we can make this space work for the foreseeable future."

The South Hemlock building would take fewer, if any, renovations because it already meets many of the school building code requirements, he said.

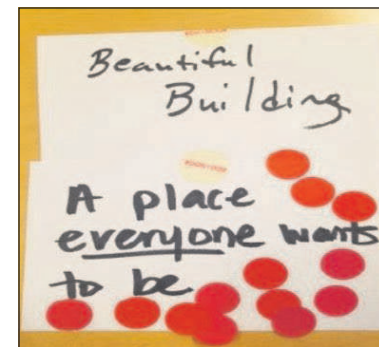
The site is larger, includes a playground and served effectively as a place for preschoolers for 39 years before its closing. The building estimate from Coaster Construction gave him a ballpark cost of \$50,000 — a lot less than the cost of renovations on Sunset Boulevard, with a construction estimate of \$240,000.

Being a stand-alone building also helps reduce cost, Simmons said, because fire code requirements in the last location were dependent on the fact the space shared walls with other retail businesses.

Because the city owns the property, the City Council must vote to give the city manager to go ahead with lease negotiations. The earliest the request can go before the Planning Commission for approval is June 22.

Housing vs. education?

Ironically, the relocation of the academy could come at the expense of the co-existing goal of affordable



Submitted Photo

Consultants for the Seaside School District held a visioning session with members of the community in May. The district's buildings are in flux.

The schools not only sit in the tsunami zone but hold serious infrastructure problems in dire need of repair, renovation or demolition.

housing. Only months after its closing in April, the city chose the site of the now-shuttered children's center for a third possible workforce housing location, along with the Spruce Street parking lot and the RV Resort.

The former children's center had a capacity of 36 students. At the time of its closing enrollment was 19, with six full time. The Cannon Beach Academy had until May 1 to enroll at least 17 kindergartners and 17 first- and second-graders combined. As of May 1, 18 kindergartners were enrolled and the first- and second-grade class has been maxed out with 22 students.

If councilors deny the property to the academy, or if the permitting and construction process doesn't meet the fall deadline, students would enroll in the Seaside School District. This would place them exactly where they are today — and where hundreds of students enrolled

at Gearhart Elementary School, Seaside High School and Broadway Middle School are now on short time in buildings considered well past their intended life span.

The average age of the three buildings is 65 years old, with a building life expectancy of 45 years, according to Seaside School District Superintendent Sheila Roley.

The schools not only sit in the tsunami zone but hold serious infrastructure problems in dire need of repair, renovation or demolition.

Campus construction is expected to be substantially complete by 2020, and will open for students in the fall of 2020.

In the more immediate future, Roley said she expects a construction manager-general contractor to be hired this month. Candidates were interviewed in May.

Considering how distant and even unlikely both the academy and the new campus seemed only a year ago, there is plenty of reason for optimism. The academy had been turned down twice before meeting its requirements to launch. And the district's \$99.7 million bond passage last November was anything but assured before its passage.

Brew pubs, fish and chips joints, even cannabis dispensaries will have little difficulty finding success in the city's thriving tourist economy. Housing and education may face a more difficult path.

As the district did to mobilize and expedite a new campus, let's ramp up efforts to meet two of the city's most critical needs, housing and education, to keep the backbone of the community strengthened for future generations. It's not that we just need one or the other, we need both.

Residents, working families and committed volunteers recognize the vital need to provide a safe and welcoming environment for our children. While a hub for tourism, businesses can't operate in a vacuum without a versatile labor pool, young workers and their families.

Time for us to lock in timelines to guarantee every student a seat in a classroom, and an opening date of September for those children ready to learn.

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