

OPINION



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OUR VIEW

Invest in America's infrastructure

Engineers say Oregon's pipes, roads, bridges and other structures are falling apart

Infrastructure is too boring a word for a set of assets that go to the very core of a functioning civilization.

Two thousand years ago, the Roman Empire conquered much of the known world partly because its leaders understood the absolute necessity of good roads, aqueducts for clean water, sewage disposal and all the other ingredients that make up infrastructure. Almost as much as military might, it was dedication to maintaining these essentials that kept Rome in power for centuries.

Much closer to our time, post-World War II construction of interstate highways bound our nation together, vastly expanding commerce and domestic travel. Other examples of important public investments could fill a book.

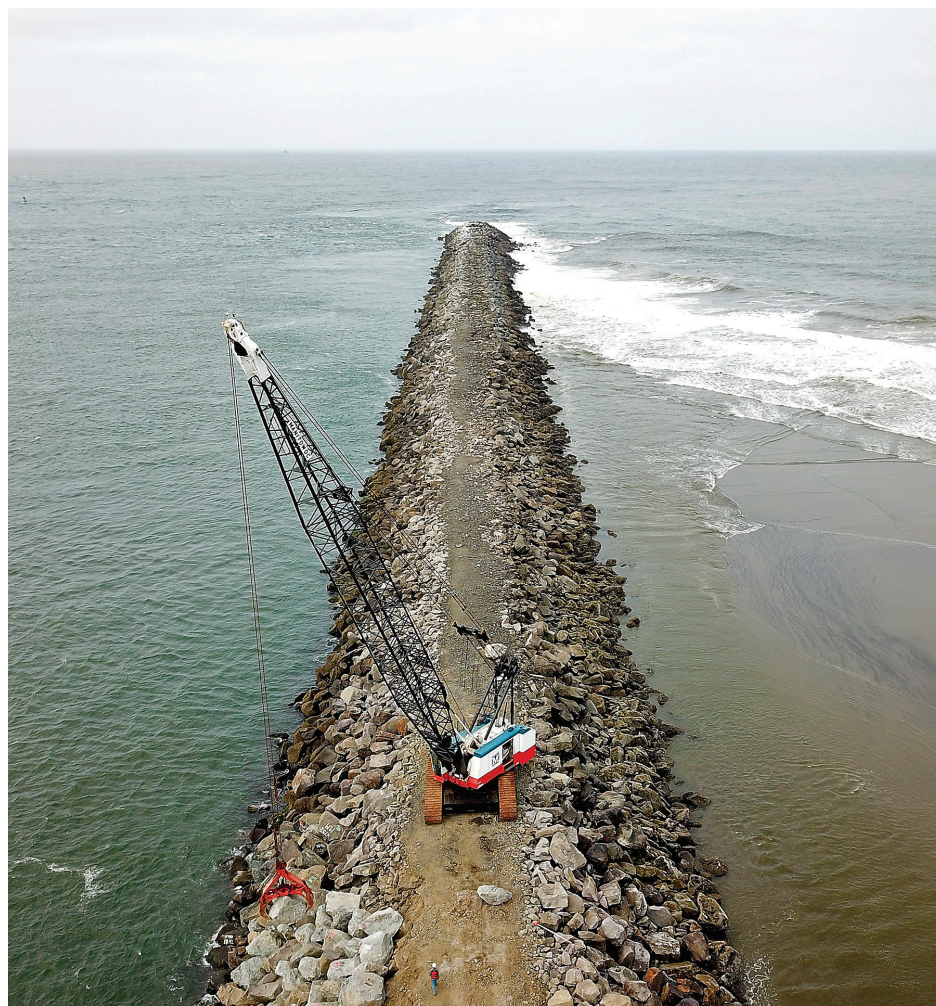
Infrastructure has been in the national news of late. Even all who question the basic competence of the president and Congress find it worth hoping that sheer political expediency and the time-tested desire to sprinkle borrowed money on local projects might prevail over all the tiresome quarreling. No such luck, so far. Wouldn't it be great if more politicians believed in investing in America instead of squandering our treasure on endless foreign wars?

In this age of paralyzed national government, we sometimes have to find other ways to keep at least some infrastructure from crumbling. Subnational entities — the states, counties, cities and even private citizens — can do the important job of identifying the most important priorities and focusing public pressure on federal agencies and appropriators.

Here in our area, there are good examples of what federal funding can achieve, and also of the strengths and weaknesses of state funding.

The Columbia River jetty system, now in the midst of a thorough multiyear renovation, is the kind of mammoth project only a federal government could build and maintain. It benefits from being hugely beneficial to a broad set of political and economic interests, making it possible to win support from Democrats and Republicans alike.

Similarly, Astoria Bridge renova-



Colin Murphey/The Astorian
A crane moves rocks into place at the North Jetty construction site. It's the kind of mammoth project only a federal government could build and maintain.

tions have largely happened thanks to the 2008 Great Recession stimulus package requested by President George W. Bush and approved by a strong bipartisan majority in Congress.

Less visible and less vital to interstate transportation, smaller projects in our area in recent years have included the John Day River Bridge east of Astoria and a whole set of U.S. Highway 101 bridges

in the USA. Our Capital Bureau reported May 16 that engineers say Oregon's infrastructure is falling apart, and that the risks are heightened by the threat of earthquakes. In January, the state got a "C-" for infrastructure upkeep by grade from the American Society of Civil Engineers. The ASCE gave Washington state only a slightly better "C" grade. Both rate better than the nation as a whole. (It's worth

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in Pacific County, among others. It doesn't take much time spent in less-developed countries to recognize how lucky we are to benefit in these public investments. Russia is particularly notorious for woefully neglecting vast areas beyond its capital and other major urban centers.

And yet it's easy to find headlines and real-world examples of infrastructure neglect right here

noting that civil engineers have a financial interest in generating more spending on public projects.)

When it comes to highway quality, it isn't uncommon for Washington residents to joke that crossing into Oregon is akin to traveling by road from the U.S. into Mexico. This comparison is especially obvious between Vancouver and Portland, where traffic moves at a slug's pace on Oregon's under-built

share of Interstate 5 and speeds like a jackrabbit in Washington. However, the ASCE gives Oregon roads a "C+" and Washington's a "C-" due to chronic congestion in the Seattle area.

Local highways and streets are another matter. On the Washington side, in Pacific County, U.S. Highway 101 has a nearly continuous narrow pothole running through Seaview, while some streets in both Clatsop and Pacific counties are embarrassingly poor.

Perhaps of greatest concern is the massive amount of work required to better prepare both states for an inevitable Cascadia Subduction Zone earthquake. Here on the coast, seismic retrofitting and relocation of infrastructure has the potential of saving many lives. It would take decades for such work to accrue a substantial benefit — but we may have time, if we get busy. In the same vein, rising sea level will require some massively expensive adjustments, some of which may be easier if started sooner.

On a less-glamorous level, both states need to improve wastewater management, and do so in ways that aren't so financially punishing to the residents of small cities and towns, which have seen spiraling public utility bills in recent years.

All this may strike some as amounting to call for more taxes on the state and federal levels to pay for investment and upkeep of public assets. This wouldn't necessarily be the case, if we ratchet back out-of-control defense spending and make other choices to prioritize domestic needs. In other cases, it can be argued that citizens and businesses alike that benefit from infrastructure like highways probably ought to contribute more to maintaining them.

Rome failed for many reasons, but a significant one was overextending itself and letting things like roads and bridge go to pot. If the U.S. isn't willing to invest more on ourselves, we will have to adjust to a future in which infrastructure in less-smart, less politically powerful and less affluent places becomes obsolete. (Sadly, the modern city of Rome is a perfect example of a massive failure in urban maintenance.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Director search disappointing

It was disappointing to read that Astoria's city management has not been able to close on a candidate for the opening for community development director ("Astoria restarts search for new community development director," The Astorian, May 23).

It takes a lot of time and effort to get to the point of extending an offer to a final candidate, only to have the offer rejected. In my experience, this should happen only in the rarest of situations.

Using a recruitment agency is a costly form of recruiting, and you should expect the utmost from them. They should be managing the candidates they present to their clients.

First of all, the agency should not be presenting any candidates who do not feel the salary range of the job is acceptable. Then, at the time an offer is extended, they should have pre-qualified the candidate to ensure the offer as formulated would be accepted.

Should the candidate show any reluctance, the company should present the candidate's concerns to the hiring body to see if any accommodation can be made, so that an acceptable offer can be made in the

first place.

It is always better to work to make an offer acceptable in the first place, than start a recruitment all over again from square one. I hope this time, we have a more positive outcome.

NORMAN BROWN
Seaside

Trabucco accusations unfounded

In review of Edward Stratton's story about the squabble between the Port's Matt McGrath and its executive director, Jim Knight, it is disturbing that Chester Trabucco should be dragged into the mix on a credibility issue ("Former Port of Astoria second-in-command blasts executive director," The Astorian, May 24).

I am a fishing guide residing at the Riverwalk Inn two months every year during the fishing season since 2013.

Days after Brad Smithart evicted all of the hotel guests in August 2015, locals Trabucco and Bill Orr reopened the Riverwalk, delivering an overnight transformation to the good. Without promise of a future, they updated the hotel, inarguably enhancing both the guest experience and the inn's value.

I have watched Chester help his employees when they were in financial need, or looked for assistance with their personal lives — he has been a good steward of both the Riverwalk and the Chinook building, and an asset to the community.

Following the rules of order, negotiations of all significant Port leases rest almost solely with the executive director. Thus, it is the director's job, not the tenant's, to communicate with staff about lease discussions with final decisions required to be voted on by the Port Commission.

So, any accusations of "back-room negotiations" on the part of Chester are unfounded, with the real disconnect and credibility issues being not with him (or any of the Port's tenants), but instead lie squarely on director Knight for his lack of responsiveness and communication with his own staff and the Port Commission regarding ongoing discussions.

ROB BIGNALL
Sherwood

Thanks for landslide help

Just want to take a moment to say thank you to everyone who helped out with the landslide by Emerald Heights before it

got too out of hand. It was close to blocking the whole road at one point in time.

It was nice to see when they started to haul dirt and debris out of there. Now that it is done, and I don't have to worry about a slide in the road, it looks really nice. The crews all did a really nice job on this project.

TREYE SMITH
Astoria

Neuter sea lions

I have been watching the sea lion problems that the Port of Astoria officials are having at the docks.

First of all, I don't believe in killing anything needlessly, but I think I might have a solution to the problem. Why not do the humane thing and dart, trap or net them, then neuter them, and let them live the rest of their lives? I'm sure veterinarians, the fisheries department, fishermen and local citizens would volunteer to help with the procedures.

In the future, their numbers would decrease greatly before salmon go extinct. We do it with stray dogs and cats, and it works great.

RALPH CAUDILL
Raymond, Washington