

BRIDGE

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edging the out-of-balance span was “too early to know, but much less than originally thought.” The port’s previous bridge contractor, HNTB, had given estimates that ranged from \$50,000 to \$500,000. McElwee said the port had allocated \$350,000 to fix the problem, but said the re-tensioning was “obviously going to be a lot less than that.”

According to McCurry, the process to balance the lift span would require making slight adjustments to the cable connections and then checking the cable tension “until code specified conditions are met.” Although HDR is early in the design and planning process for the project, McCurry expected that work on the bridge would begin in the summer and would involve “very minimal impacts, with the possibility of most of the traffic impacts occurring at night, and intermittent short delays during the daytime.”



Photo courtesy of HDR

A WORKER from HDR uses a gauge to determine the cable wear on one of the bridge’s sheaves — essentially a pulley that carries the cables over the top of the bridge’s towers.

GORGE

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exactly what happened. In its budget request, the Gorge Commission asked that each state double its contribution to the agency’s funding so that it could rehire its planners to reduce a backlog of scenic area permit applications and complete other projects that had languished due to staff reductions. The request came armed with a joint study completed by Portland State University and the University of Washington, stating that the Gorge Commission had only 25 percent of the resources needed to do its job. Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber responded by increasing the commission’s budget by 89 percent, but Washington Gov. Jay Inslee committed to only a 7-percent increase in his proposed budget.

Gorge Commission Executive Director Darren Nichols has been critical of Washington Gov. Jay Inslee’s budget — which he highlighted as an example of a “long term pattern of orchestrated disinvestment” in the commission — as well as the “outdated system” used to determine the agency’s budget. Nichols welcomed Huffman’s bill, calling it an “unprecedented and cooperative effort between the states to support the National Scenic Area and the commission’s work.”

However, Huffman’s bill won’t go anywhere if its counterpart isn’t passed by the Washington State Legislature, where it is expected to be introduced by Rep. Liz Pike (R-Camas). Additionally, Pike has also introduced HB 1453, which would provide funding for the Gorge Commission to hire two full-time planners to reduce the backlog of land use applications, with the requirement that the backlog be eliminated by July 1, 2017. In return, the commission must implement improvements to its land use application review process, as well as provide progress reports to the state every six months.

Huffman says the bills are part of a perennial battle to remind Pacific Northwest politicians of the importance of the Gorge and the federal legislation that governs it.

“Nearly seven and a half years in legislature has convinced me that Salem and Olympia know little about the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the federal act, the work of the (Gorge) Commission, the Bi-state Compact, etc.,” he said in an email. “Every odd year we head into the long budget session having to educate our colleagues about the commission and the work they have been tasked with and that defunding the commission is not only not an option, but would bring development to a screeching halt.”

Huffman added that even those legislators who were aware of the Gorge and its accompanying legislation often view the act through a “25-year-old lens” and could do with a refresh.

“I believe things have changed, AND, the administration of the Gorge can be fresh and innovative, IF, enough of us will partner to change the old thinking that remains too prevalent,” he said in the email.

The “old thinking” Huffman is referring to are people — both politicians and private citizens — who view the National Scenic Act a “conservation only” law, according to Huffman, and are missing the other key provision of the law that requires “allowing future economic development consistent with resource protection” as per the text of the act. Huffman hoped the taskforce could create a “framework for a plan and pattern of knowledge, communication, and collaboration” and help provide a foundation for the “development of transportation plans

and other systems to keep the Gorge running smoothly...”

The bills come at a time when an increasing number of public and private entities are banding together to promote the whole Gorge not only as a geographic unit, but as a political one, with shared concerns and interests. An example of this is One Gorge, a new advocacy group The Enterprise reported on last month, whose goals are to increase lobbying efforts to “increase awareness of Gorge priorities in Olympia, Salem, and Washington, D.C.,” in order to help grow and support the economy.

During a joint meeting of the Port of Hood River and the Port of Cascade Locks that was held in Hood River this week, members of the respective commissions echoed similar desires and concerns, focusing on the need to work together to further common interests — in this case, promoting both the Bridge of the Gods and the Hood River Bridge as essential to the regional economy.

Both ports advocated working with the Gorge Commission on the issue, and Paul Koch, general manager for the port of Cascade Locks, noted that the commission needed to be better funded in order to adequately foster the economic side of the National Scenic Act — something he felt had been neglected.

“Stevenson has 16-percent unemployment — what are we going to do about that? Cascade Locks has 16-percent unemployment — what are we doing about that? Underfunding the one agency who could do a lot to help us? That doesn’t cut it,” he said.

CGCC, OSU host information night

Columbia Gorge Community College and Oregon State University host an event on Jan. 28, 6 to 7:30 p.m. at CGCC in Hood River that will help students and their parents learn about OSU programs. Information will be provided for high school students and families, CGCC students considering transfer options and community members looking for opportunities at both OSU campuses — Corvallis and Bend — as well as the growing degree options through OSU Ecampus.

“We will also discuss the Degree Partnership Program and how it can help students access services from both the community college and OSU as well as take classes at both schools,” said Ann Harris, OSU Open Campus Coordinator, who will be on hand along with a representative from OSU and CGCC representatives to discuss transfer degrees, financial aid and scholarships. Harris has been working with CGCC instructors and administrators to transferable course offerings

at OSU and other universities. This fall, CGCC added new biology (BI 211, 212 and 213) and chemistry (CH 221, 222, 223) courses specifically for students who plan to transfer to STEM bachelor’s degree programs. They have also increased the number of high-level math courses that are offered, according to Harris.

OSU could be a great option and there is still time to make the Feb. 1 deadline to be considered for scholarships and Fall admission, according to Harris.

WALDEN

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WALDEN ON STATE OF THE UNION

“Having come off seven town halls this weekend in Eastern Oregon, I can tell you while the economy’s better, it’s not where it needs to go,” Greg Walden said following President Barack Obama’s Jan. 21 State of the Union address.

“And people are expecting those of us elected to go to Washington and get the job done, to get America back on track. To pass policies that will actually grow jobs that in our part of the world will actually improve forest management, create jobs in our rural communities, help our farmers and ranchers, help those in timber communities, so that we can be self-sustaining.”

“We need new, fresh ideas — not these old, top-down, Washington-knows-best, failed liberal policies that just haven’t worked.”

“The election in November was a referendum election on a lot of the president’s policies, which were rejected.”

“Together, though, we’ve got to figure out how to make America stronger, how to help middle-class America get better jobs and move forward. So, you know, the opportunities await us, and so are the responsibilities ahead of us.”

tion of SSA, saying that while it does not directly impact Hood River — “we’d love to have some of that money, but we’re okay,” Rivers said — several southwest Oregon counties are going bankrupt and eliminating virtually all services as their timber revenue sources dry up; Rivers noted that Skamania County is facing a similar dire outlook. The SSA legislation, which formally expired in 2014, provides federal school and public works funding to counties that traditionally had a heavy timber industry base.

Walden led off with another forestry issue, and returned to it twice in the town hall, tying to climate change proposed legislation for expanded forest restoration and fire protection management. Walden believes the legislation is critical not only to Oregon’s forest and wildland health but that it would also be a significant economic boost to allow companies to harvest and process downed timbers and other biofuels. The materials are prevalent in private as well as public lands throughout Oregon, in many places acting as fuels for wildfires if left on the forest floor. According to

Walden, managing these affected lands would do much to address fire dangers and result in reduced potential for release of harmful carbons, the chief contributor to global warming.

“Hopefully in conjunction with forest (management) legislation, which passed bipartisan, we can fund schools and roads, and deal with what I think is the underlying threat,” Walden said, referring to the smoke from wildfires.

Later, junior Charley Boonstra stood and told Walden that students are forming a Climate Action Club at HRVHS. With her were juniors Emilia Gendreau and Marelle Vorster, and Boonstra pointed to the silent standing adults, saying, “I stand with all my friends and all others who hold what they love. This is an issue that is not being talked about, that is being swept under the rug. We need to realize our earth is falling apart.”

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