

BRIDGES: Earthquakes a recent concern

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system. The Washington Department of Transportation included the eastbound side built in 1955 on its list of 137 bridges deemed "structurally deficient" in January 2015 based on the condition of the deck, or road bed.

WSDOT wasn't able to provide information about planned maintenance on the Umatilla Bridge before deadline but ODOT spokesman Tom Strandberg said as far as he's aware the next significant repair on the books for the Umatilla Bridge is a deck replacement for the eastbound bridge in 2017, which wouldn't do anything to shore up the bridge against seismic activity.

Around the state

Oregon does have a plan for retrofitting hundreds of other bridges that are likely to fail in a major earthquake or are getting too old to support heavy trucks. It just doesn't have a way to pay for it all, and prospects for finding a solution are dim.

The federal gas tax hasn't been raised in 21 years, and Oregon's share has been declining for years.

The state gas tax, a major funding source for transportation infrastructure projects, hasn't generated enough to repair the state's roads and bridges as cars have gotten better mileage or quit using gas at all, and a new system of charging motorists by the mile rather than the gallon is still in the experimental stage.

Leaders in the Oregon Legislature agree something must be done, but there is strong disagreement over how.



This Feb. 13, 2013, file photo, shows the viaduct that carries Interstate 5 traffic for more than a half mile over Bear Creek and city streets in Medford.

The result has been that while per capita state and federal highway funding in Oregon was up 16 percent from 2003-2008, it dropped 11 percent from 2008-2013, according to figures reviewed by The Associated Press.

"We're looking at a pretty big cliff" with no serious discussions in sight, Oregon Rep. Peter DeFazio, top Democrat on the U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said of the funding picture.

Earthquakes were not considered a major threat in Oregon until the 1980s, and bridges built before that weren't designed to withstand them. Scientists think the region is due for a massive quake, and officials want to make safety improvements to get ready.

"Areas of the state will be cut off for years by highway," said Oregon Department of Transportation Assistant Director for Communications Travis Brou-

er. "You'll be relying on helicopters."

The Oregon Highways Seismic Plus Report issued last October calls for replacing 138 bridges, and retrofitting 580 over the next 50 years in four phases. Phase one focuses on U.S. Highway 97 on the east side of the Cascades, Interstate 5 through the Willamette Valley, and two routes connecting them.

Even without the threat of earthquake, 900 of Oregon's 2,700 bridges need fixing in the next 20 years, but the projected cost is \$230 million a year, nearly five times the \$50 million available, Brouwer added. Without more money, by 2035 about 350 will have weight restrictions.

Paying for road work the usual way, through increases in the gas tax and DMV fees, has raised strong objections from Republicans, unless Democrats drop plans for legislation to combat greenhouse gases with a low-carbon fuel standard, which has passed the Senate.

That low-carbon fuel standard is likely to raise gas prices, making it very difficult to ask Oregonians to pay even more to raise money to fix roads and bridges, said Rep. Cliff Bentz, an Ontario Republican.

Meanwhile, another pilot program to demonstrate the workability of a pay-by-the-mile tax applying to high-mileage vehicles that don't pay their share via the gas tax kicks off July 1, with 5,000 volunteers. An earlier attempt based on GPS trackers was scrapped over privacy complaints.

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Ebola drug shows some promise in first tests

SEATTLE (AP) — An experimental antiviral drug shows some early, encouraging signs of effectiveness in its first human test against Ebola in West Africa, but only if patients get it when their symptoms first appear.

A study of the drug, favipiravir, is still in early stages in West Africa, and too few people have been treated to really know whether the drug helps. Other factors, like better health care, may be making a difference, and there was no comparison group of patients who got no treatment or a different drug.

Results for the first 69 adults and teens in Guinea were released Monday. Among those who got

the drug when virus levels were still low, survival was 85 percent. That seems better than the roughly 70 percent survival for patients treated in the same clinics two months before the study began, researchers said at the Retrovirus Conference in Seattle.

The drug made no difference for those who got it later. Unfortunately, the median time of symptoms when patients sought care was five days, and the infection often is well established by then.

"We have preliminary evidence" that favipiravir may be effective, says a statement by Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, which helped fund the work.

ENERGY: Monthly charge would go up \$4

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2011 and its reserves are getting uncomfortably low.

"We want to collect what it costs us to provide power," he said.

Rivera is recommending the city approve a rate increase in May and consider a slightly smaller one next year to bring the utility's revenue in line with its expenses.

Under the recommended plan, the basic monthly charge would jump from \$6.50 to \$10.50. Residential accounts, which make up 52 percent of HES's 5,300 customers, would also see their per kilowatt hour rate go up 12.4 percent. Rates for small commercial accounts would increase 7.45 percent and large commercial accounts would increase 11.84 percent.

Rivera said that would bring a typical 1500 kilowatt-hours-per-month residential customer's bill up to an average of \$112 a month. That's in comparison with Umatilla Electric Cooperative's \$118, Pacific Power's \$198, PGE's \$165 and the state average of \$158 a month.

Rivera said HES has been committed to saving Hermiston residents money and its existence has saved the community an estimated \$4 million a year in electricity bills, but "going 13 years without a rate adjustment just isn't prudent."

He said the utility also needs to build up its reserves to have the financial

standing to tackle some challenges that have resulted in a steadily declining reliability rate. The average HES customer was without power for five hours during 2014, compared to less than an hour in 2009.

Rivera presented a four year construction plan that includes replacing various problem lines around town, partnering with UEC to build a new substation and replacing customers' meters with smart meters that can increase response times by telling HES as soon as the power goes out instead of relying on customers to call.

Rivera said in addition to increasing reliability, a new substation would also address the fact that HES doesn't currently have enough capacity during peak usage months to service any new large commercial users that might want to locate on the Cook Industrial Site.

"We're actively recruiting people," he said. "We need to have a plan in place so if we do land a large customer we can serve them."

Rivera will hold a public informational meeting and take questions at city hall on Monday, March 2, from 6 to 7 p.m. He said he will incorporate feedback on the plan into his formal recommendation for the city council to vote on at their March 9 meeting.

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HANDBAGS: Berry would like to try hand at jewelry design

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orful cityscapes painted on them.

"I didn't go to design school," Berry said. "I was self-taught. So we basically learned as we went."

He approached his mother's friend Marla June in 2005 about selling his work in her newly opened boutique and she agreed. Later he expanded into "tastemaker" boutiques in Portland and Seattle, where he caught the eye of national retailers.

Over time he said he "fell in love with the fashion side" and began getting more cre-

ative with the design of the bags, moving away from the cityscapes and adding features like diagonal zippers and layers of different kinds of material.

"It's still art," Berry said. "It's just that the art is not as literal as when we first started."

Marla June said she has stocked Poverty Flats handbags faithfully since the early days of the label.

"He's such a success story," she said. "When I first opened I was trying to only carry jewelry by local artists, so I loved that he was a local designer."

She said the Poverty Flats line, which uses faux leather, sells particularly well to women looking for a fashion-forward handbag for under \$100. And people like supporting a local who made a name for himself in the wider world.

"I've cultivated a customer base that knows the Rian story and so people come in and say, 'Do you have any new Poverty Flats bags?'" she said. "The story kind of sells the bags."

Berry's line has been featured in several magazines lately, making "Top 10" lists

of must-have totes in Oprah Magazine and InStyle.

He said he has recently expanded into scarves and would like to start designing shoes and jewelry, too. Eventually he wants to add clothing to his repertoire. In the meantime he will keep expanding the global reach of the label he started in his garage.

"I do have these moments when I think of where we started and it is a little bit surreal," he said.

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ETHICS: Commission began writing new rules last year

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some of Hayes' paid consulting work on his financial disclosures, he's also said he disclosed more than required by state law.

Hayes wasn't the first Kitzhaber adviser to spark concerns about lack of transparency and potential conflicts of interest. The ethics commission's interest in the matter actually dates back to early 2014, when the commission investigated whether Patricia McCaig — Kitzhaber's top adviser on the Columbia River Crossing project — should have filed lobbying and financial disclosures.

McCaig was hired as a

consultant on the project, and the ethics commission determined it was unclear whether state law required her to file disclosures. Bersin said in early November this case revealed the need to update the law on which governor's advisors must file disclosures. "McCaig is an example, because people have complained she is an adviser in the governor's office," Bersin said.

Rebuffed by the Kitzhaber's office, Bersin and the ethics commission quietly decided last year to try a different approach: writing new rules on how to interpret state ethics law. The existing state law requires a long list of public officials to

file statements of economic interest, including chiefs of staff and "any assistant in the Governor's Office other than personal secretaries and clerical personnel."

The ethics commission says that might have been adequate when the state law was written four decades ago, but the governor's advisors now include consultants and specific employees of other agencies who are "borrowed" by the governor's office for certain projects.

The commission approved the administrative rule at its Jan. 30 meeting, which happened to take place at the same time as Kitzhaber's press conference to address

questions about Hayes' activities. Under the new rule, it appears both Hayes and McCaig would have to file disclosures.

According to the rule, "Any assistant in the Governor's office means any person who assists, advises, supplements or represents the Governor, the Governor's office or the Governor's administration pursuant to any agreement, written or otherwise, irrespective of whether the person is compensated for the services or the location the services are performed or provided."

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THERAPY: Banned in New Jersey, California, Washington D.C.

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therapy. Laws banning the practice have passed in New Jersey, California and Washington, D.C., and a dozen other states, including New York and Florida, are pushing for similar legislation.

Under the bill, social workers and licensed medical health care professionals, such as psychologists or psychiatrists, would be barred from practicing conversion therapy on children under age 18.

Paul Southwick, an attorney in Portland, said he has gone through an intensive two-year conversion therapy program with both licensed and nonlicensed professionals, and part of his treatment included having to watch heterosexual pornography. But instead of being "cured" after the program he instead felt increasingly depressed and anxious, he said.

"Essentially, conversion therapy offered me a false hope built on a flawed premise. And the flawed premise was that something was really wrong with me, that I had a sickness. And the false hope was that I could be cured," Southwick said.

The American Psychological Association says there is no evidence that the gay conversion therapy can change a person's sexual orientation. A

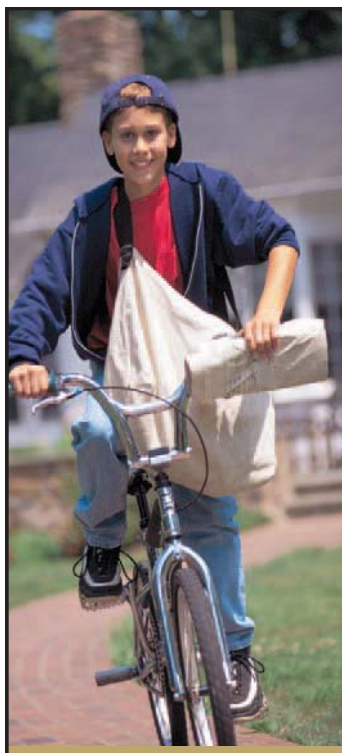
task force set up by the group found that it caused distress and anxiety.

Samantha Ames, an attorney with the National Center for Lesbian Rights, said there have been challenges to New Jersey's and California's laws

but both were upheld. Washington, D.C.'s bill hasn't gone into effect yet, she said.

Opponents often argue that because therapy takes place through talk, it constitutes free speech under the First Amendment, Ames said.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which includes Oregon, upheld California's statute in 2013 and ruled the therapy doesn't violate the free speech rights of licensed counselors and patients seeking treatment.



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