

Lawmakers recommend accountability measures for ODOT

By PARIS ACHEN Capital Bureau

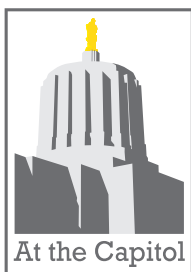
SALEM — A group of lawmakers has recommended restoring authority over the state transportation director to the Oregon Transportation Commission.

The authority now rests with the governor.

The recommendation was one of several intended to boost accountability for the use of taxpayer dollars in the event that lawmakers pass a transportation package this session.

The transportation package would infuse hundreds of millions of dollars for projects into the Department of Transportation's budget.

"In this era where we are right now where trust in government is low, accountability is a really important issue, and it's a worthwhile challenge," said Susan Morgan, a lobbyist with the Association of Oregon Counties and a former OTC commissioner.



At the Capitol

transportation dollars are spent on and how that spending is impacting the condition of the infrastructure."

The five lawmakers who made the recommendations belong to an accountability subgroup of the Legislature's Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation and Modernization.

The larger 14-member committee is charged with crafting the transportation package. Legislative leaders hope to pass the package during the 160-day session, which began Feb. 1 in Salem.

"I am of the opinion that from this point forward, we go down a list and start crafting a draft bill, ... then we amend it, ... do whatever it takes," said Rep. Andy Olson, who led the accountability subgroup.

ODOT has been criticized for its history of projects that have been overdue and over budget. A recent \$1 million management performance audit by New York-based McKinsey & Co. was intended to respond to that criticism and show ODOT is prepared to effectively

manage an influx of new highway funding.

The firm's report, released Jan. 30, portrayed an agency lacking in dissent and accountability, wasting money and needing greater oversight and guidance. The report also said the agency performed better than most transportation departments but poor compared with the private sector.

The accountability subgroup recommended adding "clawback" provisions to state transportation contracts to boost accountability over the use of taxpayer dollars.

Sen. Kathleen Taylor, D-Portland, a member of the accountability subgroup, said such provisions, often used in the private sector, give the state recourse when contractors violate their contract with inexplicable overages on cost and time.

"It's a very contentious issue, but I think citizens want to make certain that their money is being well looked over," Taylor said.

Another key recommendation would create a website dashboard, featuring a road map, where the public could follow the cost and progress of projects.

OTC chairwoman Tammy

Baney, in a letter to Gov. Kate Brown in January, complained the commission needed more oversight of the director.

Then, four former chairmen of the Oregon Transportation Commission said March 15 that the commission should regain authority over the state transportation director.

Until 1999, the commission had authority to hire and fire the director, and the director reported to the commission.

After years of pressure by Gov. John Kitzhaber, the Legislature in 1999 took that authority away and gave it to the governor, said former OTC Chairman Stuart Foster.

Minutes from the 1999 legislative meetings on the bill give no indication of the reason for the change.

"You are running the place, and you are responsible to the shareholders, and then all of a sudden, someone else is appointing the director," said Mike Hollem, who served on the OTC most recently from 1987 to 1993.

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BRIEFLY

Lawsuit accuses Seattle mayor of molesting boy in 1980s

SEATTLE (AP)—A lawsuit accuses Seattle's mayor of sexually molesting a teenage high-school dropout in the 1980s, and in interviews with The Seattle Times, two other men claim he also abused them.

Mayor Ed Murray's personal spokesman, Jeff Reading, said in a statement that the allegations are false, politically motivated and that Murray would fight them.

In a lawsuit filed Thursday, a 46-year-old man, identified only by his initials, said the abuse began in 1986 when he was 15.

Separately, the newspaper reported that two other men said they knew Murray when they lived in a Portland, Oregon, center for troubled children. They accuse Murray of abusing them in the 1980s.

The Times said one of them talked with a social worker and detective at the time. No charges were filed.

Police had warned teen about fake gun prior to death

PORTLAND (AP)—An Oregon police officer says he had warned a teen shot by a fellow police officer that carrying a fake gun might get him killed one day.

The Oregonian/OregonLive reported Wednesday that a Portland police report obtained by the newspaper states Officer Gregory Adrian had met 17-year-old Quance Hayes during a car prowl months before his death. Adrian encountered Hayes after he and a friend were accused of breaking into a car.

Officers found a fake gun in the teens' belongings. Adrian says the pair was firmly told that the toy gun looked real and may get them killed if they carried it or pointed at someone.

Court record say Hayes was shot by a police officer he reached toward his waistband as they were trying to arrest him. An internal investigation is still ongoing.

Bills would stave off opening of second Oregon women's prison

By PARIS ACHEN Capital Bureau

SALEM — Several proposals in the Legislature would stave off the need to open an expensive second women's prison in the midst of Oregon's \$1.6 billion revenue shortfall, according to initial projections.

"What we do not want to have to do is open new prisons," said Sen. Elizabeth Steiner-Hayward, D-Beaverton. "The last thing the state can afford to do is put more and more of our hard-earned dollars into prisons instead of education and health care and the human services that will prevent people from interacting with the criminal justice system in the first place."

Two bills to expand eligibility for the Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program received widespread support from criminal justice reformers and law enforcement during legislative hearings Tuesday and Wednesday.

Another bill to expand the length of an early release program from 90 to 180 days for inmates convicted of nonviolent property and drug crimes faces opposition

from the Oregon District Attorneys Association.

The Family Sentencing Alternative Pilot Program diverts the parents of minor children from prison and allows them to stay in the community under supervision. The offenders also receive wraparound services such as drug treatment or parenting classes.

Last year, 75 parents participated in the program in five counties: Multnomah, Washington, Marion, Deschutes and Jackson. That helped to keep 139 children out of foster care, according to a joint report by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Corrections.

"Women oftentimes have child abuse or sexual abuse histories. In turn, they develop mental health issues and then they start self-medicating through drugs and alcohol, poor relationships, (and) eventually end up participating in drug offenses, property crime," said Tira Hubbard, a parole and probation officer in Jackson County.

"That rolls them into the criminal justice system. By just treating the addiction and the criminality and not looking at those underlying root causes, we're just treating the

symptoms and not the virus."

Speakers at hearings in the House and Senate judiciary committees unanimously supported two bills that would open up the program to pregnant women. Some pregnant women who otherwise qualified for the program were rejected and were sent to prison.

"Having a baby in prison is a really, really rough situation," said Rep. Tawna Sanchez, D-Portland, who has worked extensively for social justice organizations. After giving birth, the women have to "immediately give the child to someone else," Sanchez said.

The other bill to expand an early release program called Short-Term Transitional Leave is provoking more controversy. The proposal would expand the 90-day program to 180 days.

Inmates who don't have a mandatory minimum sentence and have no violations in the past 12 months are eligible for the program. In the first two years, program failures were minimal, according to the CJC.

Nevertheless, district attorneys have come out against the expansion, citing a 2013 agreement with the then-House Majority Leader

and two now-retired lawmakers not to revisit sentencing changes for at least five years.

"The most important reason I oppose (the bill) is it erodes an important pillar of a good justice system and that is truth in sentencing," said Linn County District Attorney Doug Marteeny.

Marteeny said victims may be unaware that an offender won't have to serve all of his or her sentence.

Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, responded that it's prosecutors' job to let victims know how the system works.

The expansion would postpone the need to open a second women's prison by at least two years, according to analysis by the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission. The cost of opening the second facility would be about \$9.5 million.

The population at the state's only women's prison, Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville, has hovered above capacity for more than a year. The limit is 1,280. On Wednesday the population was 1,298, according to DOC.

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