

Lawmakers could vote Saturday on smaller transportation bill

By **PARIS ACHEN**
Capital Bureau

SALEM — A legislative committee could vote as soon as Saturday on a dramatically diminished statewide transportation funding bill.

Legislative lawyers released a 295-page amendment to the bill late Friday. The proposal raises \$5.3 billion over a seven-year period through increases in the gas tax, registration fees and new taxes on payroll, new vehicle purchases and bicycles priced more than \$200. However, the new plan excludes several congestion-busting projects in the Portland area that would have been funded through a state-local match.

The plan hikes the state's existing 30-cent gas tax gradually over a seven-year period to a total of 40

cents. Meanwhile, the plan increases registration fees by \$13 and title fees by \$16 in 2018. Beginning in 2020, the state would move toward a tiered system of registration and title fees based on a vehicle's gas mileage.

The gas tax hike and registration fees will fund about \$10 million per year in Safe Routes to Schools sidewalk improvements and to partially fund a congestion-relieving project on Interstate 5 in the Rose Quarter. The rest of the money will be distributed to the state, counties and cities for road and bridge maintenance and improvements.

The original \$8.2 billion funding proposal would have funded projects to widen Interstate 205 from Stafford Road to Oregon City and to replace the Abernathy Bridge on I-205 between Oregon City and West Linn. The bill also would have raised the gas tax even more in the

Portland area to raise funds for the metro congestion projects.

Instead, the proposal directs the Oregon Transportation Commission to establish a tolling program on I-205 and I-5. The program would be used to fund congestion-busting projects on Interstate 205 and Interstate 5 from the Washington state line to where the two interstates cross south of Portland.

Authors of the transportation package, legislative leaders and Gov. Kate Brown negotiated an agreement between Democrats and Republicans to trim the size of the package and to place a cost cap on the state's low carbon fuels standard. The deal was intended to win enough votes to reach the constitutionally-required three-fifths majority in each chamber for raising taxes.

The deal included reducing the gas tax increase and an excise tax

on the sale of new vehicles, from 1 percent to 0.5 percent. About \$12 million of the revenue from the proceeds of the vehicle excise tax would be used for rebates on the purchase of electric vehicles.

A \$15 flat fee would be charged on the purchase of new adult bicycles with a price tag of more than \$200. The proceeds would go toward paying for commuter bicycle and pedestrian paths.

Under the pending proposal, the first 4-cent gas tax increase would trigger in 2018, with subsequent 2-cent hikes every other year.

A payroll tax of less than 0.1 percent would raise money to fund public transit.

A sticking point in negotiations was Republicans' request for changes to state's low-carbon fuels standard, which calls for greenhouse gas emission reductions by 2025. In

the agreement, the GOP won a cost cap of \$200 per subsidy for efforts such as alternative fuel production and electric vehicles, a concession Republicans wanted to control the cost of the program. The deal also allows temporary suspension of parts of the program when there are fuel shortages.

Brad Reed, spokesman for Renew Oregon, has said the compromise "will protect the core integrity of the program" and give clean fuels businesses enough certainty to allow them to invest in Oregon.

The original bill called provided an innovative funding mechanism for the I-205 and Rose Quarter projects in which the state and the City of Portland would share the cost of the projects. "Going Dutch" would have required an additional increase in gas taxes only in the Portland area, which the fuels association opposed.



In this June 13 photo, demolition work continues on the Plutonium Finishing Plant on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation near Richland, Wash. The U.S. Department of Energy says there is a high risk that a second tunnel filled with radioactive waste might collapse on the Hanford site. A tunnel partially collapsed at the site on May 9 forcing some 3,000 workers to seek shelter for a few hours.

HANFORD: Partial collapse of the roof might have been caused by heavy rainfall

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mately 1,700 feet long and is covered with eight feet of soil to prevent radiation from escaping. Inside are 28 flat-bed rail cars containing nuclear waste, including giant storage vessels and other large equipment from plutonium production.

The tunnel was sealed in 1996 and has not been entered since, said Doug Shoop, Hanford manager for the Energy Department.

The ceiling of Tunnel 1, which was built in 1956 and is 360 feet long, partially collapsed in May. That tunnel contains eight rail cars carrying radioactive waste, and it was sealed in 1965.

As a result of the partial collapse of Tunnel 1, Hanford officials have started daily inspections of the two tunnels and installed remote-controlled cameras to monitor them, Shoop said. They are considering using remote-controlled equipment to go inside the tunnels and assess their condition, Shoop said.

"These tunnels are not safe and have literally been out of sight and out of mind," said U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., a frequent

Hanford critic. "I'm calling for action now in order to protect Hanford workers, the public and the environment from this ongoing threat."

Shoop said the Energy Department plans to fill the partially collapsed Tunnel 1 with grout by the end of the year, to stabilize the structure until a permanent disposal plan is created.

The new report said the partial collapse of the roof might have been caused by heavy rainfall a few days before, or deterioration of timber supports because of age and exposure to radiation.

The Energy Department believes the risk to employees and the environment from a collapse of Tunnel 2 is minimal, because the eight feet of soil atop the tunnel would sink into it and prevent or minimize radiation from escaping, the agency said.

Radioactive and chemical waste in the two tunnels was created by the nearby Plutonium Uranium Extraction Plant.

Hanford was built by the Manhattan Project during World War II as the U.S. raced to beat Germany to create an atomic bomb. Hanford made the plutonium

for the atomic bomb dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, at the end of the war and went on to make about 60 percent of the nation's plutonium during the Cold War.

The site now contains the nation's greatest volume of radioactive defense wastes. Cleanup of the site is expected to last until 2060 and cost an additional \$100 billion.

Richardson offers limited data to Trump commission, for \$500

SALEM (AP) — Oregon's chief election official on Friday told President Donald Trump's commission investigating allegations of voter fraud that it could receive a statewide list of voters for \$500, just like anyone else.

Oregon Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, however, said in response to the commission's request for publicly available details on all voters in the state that he's barred legally from disclosing Social Security and driver's license numbers.

Two members of Oregon's congressional delegation and Gov. Kate Brown had urged Richardson, a Republican in this Democratic-leaning state, to refuse the request that went to secretaries of state around America.

Richardson said in a letter to commission vice chairman and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach that there is "very little evidence" of voter fraud or registration fraud in Oregon.

"I do not believe the federal government should be involved in dictating how states conduct their elections,"

Richardson said.

Among the secretary of state's key missions, according to Richardson's official website, is to "maximize voter participation and protect ballot security in order to promote Oregon's healthy democracy."

U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, a Democrat, charged via Twitter that the request is a tool of voter suppression, and said Richardson should follow the lead of some of his counterparts in other states, and not provide data.

Rep. Earl Blumenaur and Brown, also Democrats, agreed.

"We should protect voters' information and expand access to the ballot, not suppress it," Brown tweeted.

The Democratic Party of Oregon said it believes the request "is an effort to mislead the American public about the integrity of our voter rolls."

The Presidential Advisory

Commission on Election Integrity asked secretaries of state to provide, by July 14, voters' information including birthdates, the last four digits of their Social Security numbers, about felony convictions and military status, party affiliations, what elections they voted in since 2006, and voter registration in other states.

Richardson wrote in response that "any person may receive a statewide list of electors upon payment of \$500."

Kobach had said the data he sought will help the commission "fully analyze vulnerabilities and issues related to voter registration and voting."

Trump, who lost the popular vote in the 2016 presidential election, created the commission through an executive order in May. He has said voter fraud existed in the election that he won by Electoral College votes.

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