

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

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OUR VIEW

Avoiding Portland traffic at all costs

It doesn't take a traffic engineer to determine that Portland is highway-impaired. Traffic in Oregon's largest city is slow.

How slow is it, you ask?

A few years ago, the state Department of Transportation estimated that 34,600 hours a day were wasted in Portland traffic jams. That's nearly four years of people's time that was wasted each day. We'd bet the number is much larger now.

And just think of what all that stalled traffic does to the climate. A car or truck stuck in Portland traffic is producing carbon dioxide but getting zero miles per gallon. By that standard alone, Portland must be a major contributor to climate change.

Portland traffic is so bad people headed for the airport often have to factor in an extra hour of drive time just to avoid missing their flights.

Portland traffic is so bad the state Legislature set aside \$25 million to help agricultural shippers in the nearby Willamette Valley avoid it.

The plan is to build an "intermodal facility" somewhere in the Willamette Valley south of Portland. Trucks will haul containers full of hay and other agricultural commodities from farms and processors to a loading terminal where the containers can be loaded onto railroad cars. From there, trains would go to ports in Tacoma or Seattle for export overseas, thus avoiding

Portland traffic snarls. The Port of Portland handles only a tiny number of container ships, making the trip to Tacoma and Seattle necessary.

It should be noted that there are already three such intermodal facilities in the region — including one at the port — but all are in Portland. Trucks hauling containers to those facilities are just as likely to get caught in traffic.

If Interstates 5, 205 and 405 had adequate capacity, and if traffic not bound for Portland could avoid its multi-lane parking lots, many problems could be solved. But, for whatever reason, that is not to be.

Having a \$25 million intermodal facility in the valley represents the next best thing for valley growers and processors who still have to get their crops and goods to ports for shipment to overseas customers.

In the running are two proposals. One would be built in Brooks, a few miles north of Salem. The other would be a repurposed paper mill in Millersburg, a few miles south of Salem.

What about the rest of us?

Eastern Oregon drivers have to make hard decisions when planning trips to points in the Willamette Valley or Oregon Coast. Do we try to avoid the ever-growing rush hour time windows, just brave the traffic, or plan lengthy detours that can add hours to a journey?

Any solution appears to be years



AP file photo

Traffic in Portland is a challenge for drivers looking to get anywhere else fast.

away, and expensive to boot.

The Oregon Transportation Commission voted unanimously recently to seek federal approval for tolling Interstates 5 and 205 through the Portland area and to study creating a seamless loop of tollways around the city. Those tolls might also extend to Interstate 405, Interstate 84, U.S. Route 26, State Highway 217 and sections of U.S. Route 30.

Unless there's a massive national investment in public transportation networks, such as passenger rail — highly unlikely — we will have to rely on our automobiles for decades to come. And tolls may be the only way to get new roads built.

Those of us who have experienced East Coast traffic snarls sincerely hope the Portland planners take to heart the lessons learned there. Any toll road that forces drivers to stop and make change creates miles-long backups.

Only systems like EZPass that allow vehicles to whiz by and record the toll electronically have any hope of reducing congestion. Drivers without passes could have their license plates scanned, with automated bills arriving in the mail, much as camera speed traps operate. It smacks of Big Brother, but it works.

Any solution that allows us to travel around Portland, rather than through it, is worthy of pursuing — even tolls. No one likes to pull out their wallet just to get from point A to point B in their automobile. But to do nothing, and allow our roads to become ever more unusable, isn't an option.

We need to think big for the future. President Eisenhower thought big in the 1950s when he built the national interstate system. It transformed our nation. What will transform travel in the 21st century?

OTHER VIEWS

Climate change effects getting more real

Orange County (California) Register, Aug. 14

Even — or especially — among those who agree human-caused global warming is happening, the footnote has been the understanding that no individual weather event or catastrophe is caused by the overall temperature rise.

Until this summer in the Northern Hemisphere.

It's not just hot here in California, where it's always hot in July, August and September. It's not just Death Valley, where German tourists always flock to feel the heat they (formerly) couldn't at home.

It was hovering around 90 degrees Fahrenheit at the Arctic Circle in Norway and Sweden last week. In July, the hottest temperature ever recorded in Scotland was hit — 92 degrees in a village near Glasgow. It was 106 in Japan, also that nation's highest ever.

And while it's often in the triple digits in the air here, the Pacific Ocean had never in 102 years of daily water-temperature readings hit 78 degrees at the pier in La Jolla where the Scripps Institute is — until this summer.

Rising ocean temperatures are another feature of global warming, and will radically alter our formerly famous Mediterranean climate insofar as nighttime air temperatures go. Unlike most of the rest of the country, when California has a 95-degree summer day, it's never been unusual for the outdoors temp to cool to the mid-50s by late evening. Felt anything like the upper 50s lately? Up and down California, last month saw the highest minimum temperature statewide of any month since 1895, rising to 64.9, from the redwood forest to the Coachella

Valley, Ron Lin and Javier Panzar report in the *Los Angeles Times*.

And so, yes, to answer many Californians' understandable question, climate change is contributing to the unprecedented wildfire seasons we are seeing this year and last. Global warming is without a doubt a culprit in the suddenly year-round fire danger we face throughout our state. The higher temperatures mean dried-out trees, forest undergrowth and grasslands. Those plants burn more easily when a spark of any kind ignites them — mostly, of course, also man-made sparks, but now with drier kindling to deal with. And the snowmelt and river levels are lower, too, because of climate change.

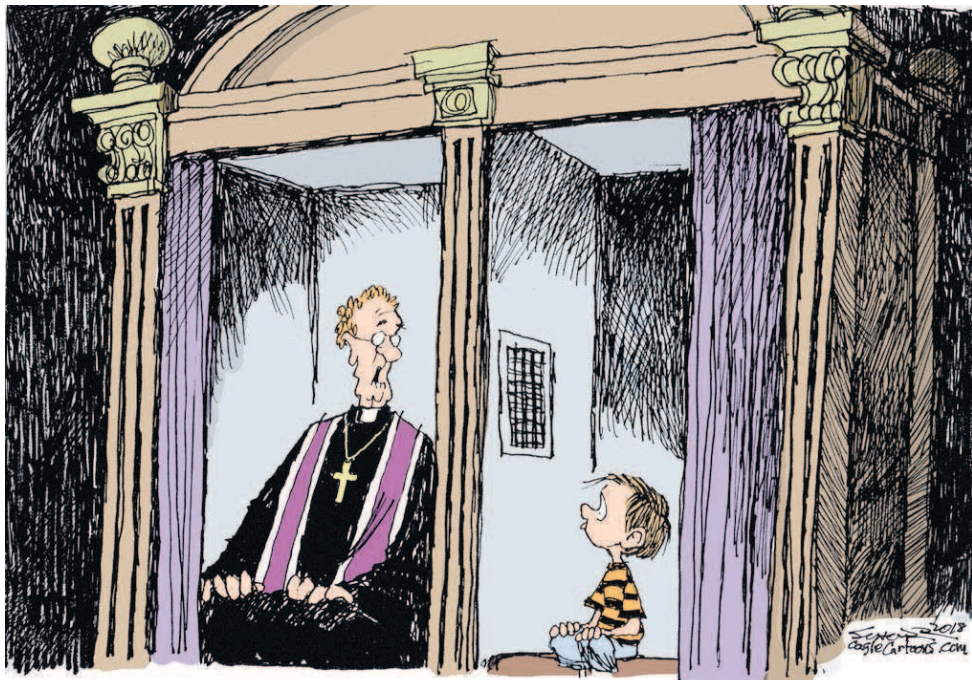
The *San Francisco Chronicle* cites a report in which researchers at Columbia University and the University of Idaho showed that human-caused warming had dried out our forests so much that fire seasons throughout the West have expanded by an average of nine days every year since 2000.

So — now that the demonstrably real effects of climate change are affecting our California lives every day, what to do about it? It's only human to lament the lost opportunities, the fact that responsible scientists warned us two decades ago that this would come to pass if we didn't halt the rise in greenhouse-gas production. But humans have faced existential threats before, in the last century — from world wars, from nuclear weapons. Now is the time to not give into despair but to lobby our leaders, and governments around the world, telling them to stop sticking their heads in the (hot) sand, believe the science and begin a technical approach to reversing the real problem humans have brought to our planet.

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"FORGIVE ME, CHILD... FOR I HAVE SINNED..."

OTHER VIEWS

Ambitious better than indifference on homelessness

The Eugene Register-Guard

Republican Knute Buehler is making homelessness a centerpiece of his campaign for governor, and the focus is welcome. He has released a seven-point plan for ending unsheltered homelessness in Oregon by 2023 — and while details of his program are open to dispute, Buehler has done a service by elevating this issue to the state level. Buehler and incumbent Democratic Gov. Kate Brown should debate homelessness with the same urgency they devote to education and health care.

Homelessness has tended to be regarded as a local problem, or an urban problem — but it's an Oregon problem, affecting every county in the state. And at a time when Oregon's unemployment rate is uncharacteristically below the national average, the number of homeless people in the state is growing. In a meeting with *The Register-Guard's* editorial board, Buehler cited a 2017 federal report that found a 6 percent increase in the number of homeless people in Oregon over the past two years, and that Oregon has the nation's highest

rate of youth homelessness.

Buehler said he's talking about homelessness because he's hearing about it from voters all over the state — they see its effect on law enforcement, health care, education and the quality of life. The scale of the problem demands state leadership, Buehler said, and he's right. He also showed a firm grasp of the fact that the many costs of homelessness, ranging from increased emergency room visits to a loss of human dignity, can exceed the cost of programs to address it.

Buehler proposes improving Medicaid-funded mental health services, opening 4,000 temporary shelter beds, creating 4,000 spaces in supported housing programs, providing rental assistance for low-income families, expanding affordable housing programs, giving local governments more authority to regulate behavior such as lying on sidewalks, enhancing job training and other measures to address or prevent homelessness. The overarching goal would be to provide people with the means to move toward self-sufficiency.

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