

# PORT: There is no rail on the north side

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improvements, bridge construction, and improvements to specific terminal sites.

“It will give us the opportunity to not only increase existing business, but add businesses,” Mittlesdorf said.

She said that could include several types of businesses similar to those at the port now that transport contained products, solid waste, ethanol, wood chips and grain. She said they may even look into transporting food and refrigerated containers.

“Those are all things we’ll look at, but I can’t say there’s a particular project,” she said.

The port’s engineers will spend 2019 planning and designing the rail upgrades and getting permits. The port will begin the bidding process in 2020, and construction is planned to last until 2023.

Maps of the proposed expansions show that there will be two main components of the rail project: one will extend new rail lines from a new track, adjacent to the Union Pacific mainline, to three separate marine terminals in the port’s industrial park.

“It will be a huge construction project,” she said. “Right now there is no rail on the north side of the Union Pacific mainline.”

Terminal 1, which is a slip owned by the port, is being dredged of sand so it can be used more regularly.

The second major expansion will improve access the Morrow County Grain Growers terminal, which is under construction to get five new additional 200,000-bushel storage bins, a new bottom-dump rail unloading facility, and conveyor systems. Most of the expansions for that project will be funded by the \$6.5 million state grant.

“That project is set to start construction very quickly,” Mittlesdorf said.

Mittlesdorf thanked U.S. Rep. Greg Walden and both of Oregon’s senators, Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, for their role in securing the grant.

“They made phone calls, they did everything to support us,” she said.

She said as of now, they don’t anticipate any costs that will fall outside the \$26 million that the two grants will cover.



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

A team of mules pulls a carriage during the city Christmas tree lighting on Thursday in Hermiston.

# LIGHTS: Light show 5 days a week, Monday through Friday

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day decorating competition. Pedro announced Hermiston Drug & Gift as the winner of the contest.

After the tree-lighting, families listened to Hermiston High School’s Majaztzy choir or stood in line for pictures with Santa.

Mallory Rehnke, 10, said she was going to ask for a unicorn. The adults in her group told her that

probably wasn’t going to happen, but she had faith.

Standing with her were Isabel Newton, 5, who had her heart set on a “big doll house” in pink, and Aurora Rojas, 6, who wanted a skateboard.

“I’m gonna learn with my dad,” she said.

Some children in line were still thinking about what they want most to appear under the tree on Christ-

mas morning — JT Hudson, 7, finally decided on a Nintendo, while Reagan Hudson, 4, wants a Barbie Dream House. But others came prepared. Audrey Wright, 5, wrote her list down in a letter to Santa to make sure she didn’t forget anything.

“I want a special dolly, and candy cane, and a sled,” she listed.

Once the big moment arrived, some children hopped right up on Santa’s lap. Others were more shy.

A small girl in a bright pink coat resisted getting too near, but did consent to reaching out for a dainty high five.

The Christmas tree and other lights in the festival street area, located on Northeast Second Street between Main Street and Gladys Avenue, will be part of a light show performed each Monday through Friday at 5 p.m., 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. until Christmas.

# STDs: Reduced funding means fewer intervention specialists

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ilis in 2018, compared with seven in 2017.

However, not all cases are reported, not by a long shot. Many affected people don’t know they’re walking around with an STD.

“It’s common to have no symptoms,” Fiumara said. “Someone can go for quite a while before they know there’s a problem.”

He urged regular screening for those at risk.

Menza attributes the national explosion in STDs to several factors.

With improved treatments for HIV/AIDS, the fear of dying from the disease has subsided. As a result, people are more relaxed about engaging in risky sexual behavior.

Also, with years of cutbacks in federal funding for the screening and treatment of STDs, money is tight. Menza said one consequence of reduced funding is fewer disease intervention specialists who track down people testing positive for STDs. The specialists work the phones and sometimes knock on doors.

In Umatilla County, when the health department gets a positive report of an STD, a communicable disease nurse contacts the affected person via phone or text.

“We talk about the risk factors and provide an opportunity for treatment,” Fiumara said.

“We try to get contact information and do followup with partners. We hope they listen and take heed.”

Testing and treatment for gonorrhea and chlamydia is fairly cheap, he said, while treating syphilis is more expensive. How-

ever, he said, “we don’t turn anyone away for lack of ability to pay.”

Prevention is the better and less-risky way to go. Those condoms available at the Umatilla County Public Health Department aren’t for decoration — they protect against STDs.

“They’re not 100 percent,” Fiumara said, “but they’re close.”

He urged routine screenings, available by appointment at the Pendleton office on Mondays and Tuesdays and Hermiston on Thursdays and Fridays.

# BUDGET: Rural unemployment has been declining since its peak in 2009

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communities large and small across Oregon,” Brown told reporters as she released her budget proposal.

There’s enthusiasm from observers about Brown’s spending plans for rural Oregon, from dams to housing to high-speed internet.

But some advocates and lawmakers worry about other parts of her budget that cut fire protection on forestland, hold steady money for community colleges and increase taxes by \$2 billion.

Rural areas of the state face unique challenges. Despite the state’s robust overall economic growth, rural Oregon has yet to fully bounce back from the Great Recession.

Rural unemployment has been declining since its peak in 2009, and the state’s rural economy is less diverse, making it more vulnerable to shocks. And the populace and workforce in non-metro areas of Oregon are aging, according to a report last year from the state Employment Department.

While the income of rural Oregonians is about equal to other rural areas of the country, state economists say, housing is about 30 percent more expensive.

The governor wants to offer a carrot to developers to build more affordable housing across the state.

She wants to boost funding for loan programs and for public-private partnerships to build housing for people who can’t find affordable homes in the communities where they work. Brown wants the state to borrow \$130 million through bonds to build up to 2,100 affordable homes for communities of color and in rural areas.

The governor has also proposed millions in water

projects.

Brown’s budget allots \$16 million to replace the Wallowa Dam, which is more than a century old and whose operators keep less water than it was built to hold to avoid a failure.

Todd Nash, chair of the Wallowa County Commission, said that replacing the dam could help increase water for irrigating crops such as timothy hay and alfalfa.

“That would mean additional water for some of those areas that have been underserved by water...to continue to irrigate and that is a big win for Wallowa County,” Nash said.

And Brown wants to divvy millions for rural community colleges across the state, with a focus on career readiness.

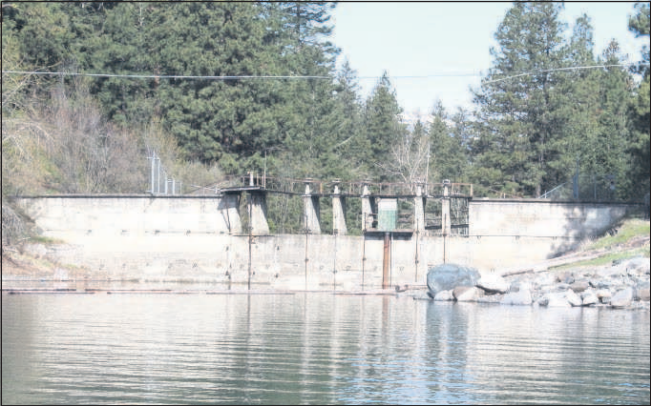
Brown’s wish list includes an agricultural workforce center at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton and an industrial trades center at Klamath County Community College in Klamath Falls.

Oregon’s 17 community colleges had about 280,000 students in the 2016-17 school year, according to the Higher Education Coordinating Commission. They primarily serve rural areas.

But unless the Legislature raises nearly \$2 billion in new taxes for her major education revival plan, Brown’s budget would reduce money that community colleges say they need to continue current operations for the next two years.

It would also cut funds to Oregon Promise, which covers tuition for certain students.

Ron Paradis, head of college relations for Central Oregon Community College in Bend, said the college



Contributed photo by Angelika Dietrich

The Wallowa Lake Dam has been in need of repair for decades, and has \$16 million allotted in Gov. Kate Brown’s new budget.

would get less money under the basic budget than it currently does.

“It would definitely mean cuts, or tuition increases,” Paradis wrote in an email.

The college operates campuses in Bend, Redmond, Prineville and Madras with an enrollment this fall of about 5,000 students.

## Sluggish internet

The governor wants more rural Oregonians to have high-speed internet that could “literally bridge the urban-rural divide,” she said in October.

Joseph Franell, CEO of Eastern Oregon Telecom who chairs the state Broadband Advisory Council, said that he was “thrilled” about the governor’s proposal to create a Broadband Office and allocate \$5 million to a broadband infrastructure fund.

The Broadband Office would develop partnerships between government and private companies to expand high-speed internet to rural Oregon, pursue federal funding and support local efforts to develop faster internet.

There’s a technical advantage in having a dedicated broadband office. It could help the state qualify for more federal funding,

Franell said.

As the economy and daily life depends more on the internet, reliable and fast internet service can connect rural Oregonians to services like health care and education, Franell said.

“If the Colt .45 revolver was the great equalizer of the 1800s, broadband is the great equalizer of our era,” Franell said, “And when I say that, there’s no one thing other than broadband that has such potential for positive impact on people’s lives.”

For example, instead of traveling for hours to see a specialist, more rural residents could use medical video conferencing, often called telehealth.

“If you have good, reliable, fast access to broadband, regardless of location, you can get educated, literally all the way up to a Ph.D.,” Franell said. “Regardless of where you live, you can get health, you can connect with government in ways you couldn’t before.”

Rural communities have had problems enticing private companies to build high-speed internet infrastructure.

John Day City Man-

ager Nick Green said that there is not much incentive for companies to invest in high-speed internet in rural or frontier communities. There’s a lot of space and not many people per square mile to pay for the service.

And getting federal money is tough. Green found out last week that the city hadn’t been awarded a federal grant to help bring broadband to the area. It had spent about \$100,000 to prepare the grant application.

Internet is so sluggish at John Day City Hall that he couldn’t directly upload that application.

He hopes that more support from the state would help communities like his get federal dollars to close the broadband service gap, which impacts schools, libraries and other government functions.

## Police, fires and farmers

A smattering of other proposals could improve life in rural communities. The governor wants to phase in hundreds of new state troopers over the next ten years, which would improve emergency response times in rural areas of the state.

And she wants to put \$10 million toward cleaning up contaminated rural Oregon lands.

A front-and-center environmental concern in many rural areas, though, is smoke. Come summer, gray skies and ash afflict rural parts of the state where wildland fires are more common, and local residents and lawmakers have clamored for a change to forest management policies to address smoke issues.

Brown wants to establish, through the executive order, a council on wildfire response to evaluate Oregon’s system for responding

to large fires.

The council’s job would be to figure out whether Oregon’s current mode of fighting fires is “sustainable” and recommend changes.

Senate Republican Leader Jackie Winters, of Salem, said that while the governor’s efforts to address fire issues were “long overdue,” she didn’t think decreases in the fire protection budget would help.

The governor’s budget attributed the dip is due to one-time costs for recent large fires.

Jonathan Sandau, government affairs specialist at the Oregon Farm Bureau, pointed to a number of proposals in the governor’s proposed budget that could be a boon for rural communities.

He was encouraged by her support of economic development projects in rural Oregon through the Regional Solutions program and efforts to expand broadband service. She also wants to extend tax credits for farmers who house agricultural workers and donate crops to food banks or other charities.

Those credits are set to expire in the next budget.

But Sandau worried that the governor’s push for education funding — if new taxes don’t pass — could sideline funding for natural resource agencies like the state Agriculture Department, the Fish and Wildlife Department and the state’s watershed enhancement board.

Those agencies do everything from regulating the pesticides that farmers use to managing wolves that prey on livestock.

“Oregon is a natural resources economy, and a lot of lives, and jobs and communities depend on that,” Sandau said.