

U.S. miscalculated benefit of better train brakes

By **MATTHEW BROWN**
Associated Press

and ethanol in the U.S. and Canada.

BILLINGS, Mont. — President Donald Trump's administration miscalculated the potential benefits of putting better brakes on trains that haul explosive fuels when it scrapped an Obama-era rule over cost concerns, The Associated Press has found.

A government analysis used by the administration to justify the cancellation omitted up to \$117 million in estimated future damages from train derailments that could be avoided by using electronic brakes. Revelation of the error stoked renewed criticism Thursday from the rule's supporters who called the analysis biased.

Department of Transportation officials acknowledged the mistake after it was discovered by the AP during a review of federal documents but said it does not change their decision not to install the brakes.

Safety advocates, transportation union leaders and Democratic lawmakers oppose the administration's decision to kill the brake rule, which was included in a package of rail safety measures enacted in 2015 under President Barack Obama following dozens of accidents by trains hauling oil

The deadliest happened in Canada in 2013, when an unattended train carrying crude oil rolled down an incline, came off the tracks and exploded into a massive ball of fire, killing 47 people and obliterating much of the Quebec community's downtown.

There have been other fiery crashes and fuel spills in Alabama, Oregon, Montana, Virginia, West Virginia, North Dakota and Illinois.

After the brake rule was enacted, lobbyists for the railroad and oil industries pushed to cancel it, citing the high cost of installing so-called electronic pneumatic brakes and questioning their effectiveness.

But supporters of the brakes said the issue should be reconsidered given the miscalculation and concerns about other benefits that may have been ignored, including reducing the frequency of runaway trains and severity of train-on-train collisions, said Robert Duff, a senior adviser to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, a Democrat.

"This is not theoretical risk. We've actually seen these derailments," Duff said. "We think there are potentially other benefits that have been left out. Shouldn't



KGW-TV via AP, File

Smoke billows from a Union Pacific train that derailed near Mosier on June 3, 2016 in the scenic Columbia River Gorge.

all this be redone, with all the benefits reconsidered? Show us that the costs still outweigh the benefits."

Unlike other systems where brakes are applied sequentially along the length of a train, electronic pneumatic brakes, or ECP, work on all cars simultaneously. That can reduce the distance and time a train needs to stop and cause fewer cars to derail.

"These ECP brakes are very important for oil trains," said Steven Dittmeyer, a rail safety expert and former senior official at the Federal Railroad Administration. "It makes a great deal of sense: All the brakes get applied immediately, and

there would be fewer cars in the pileup."

Under Obama, the Transportation Department determined the brakes would cost up to \$664 million over 20 years and save between \$470 million and \$1.1 billion from accidents that would be avoided.

The Trump administration reduced the range of benefits to between \$131 million and \$374 million. Transportation Department economists said in their analysis that the change was prompted in part by a reduction in oil train traffic in recent years, which meant there would be fewer derailments.

The transport of crude

oil on U.S. railroads peaked in 2014 when 540,000 tank cars shipped. That fell to about 210,000 carloads last year, most of it from the Bakken oil patch of North Dakota and Montana, according to industry figures.

But in making their calculations, the economists left out the most common type of derailments in which spilled and burning fuel causes property damage but no mass casualties, the AP found. Equipping fuel trains with electronic brakes would reduce damages from those derailments by an estimated \$48 million to \$117 million, according to Department of Transportation estimates that were left out of the administration's final tally.

Including the omitted benefits reduces the net cost of the requirement to as low as \$63 million under one scenario laid out by the agency.

Transportation spokesman Bobby Fraser said the omission was unintentional and would not have changed September's decision to cancel the electronic brake requirement. Under the administration's analysis, the cost of the brakes would have outweighed the benefits even when considering estimated damages from derailments that were left out of the original findings.

However, excluding those potential damages means the difference between costs and benefits would have been much narrower.

A 2015 act of Congress mandated that the Department of Transportation repeal the braking requirement if an analysis showed more costs than benefits. Fraser said a correction to the agency's findings will be published to the federal register, but the repeal will stand.

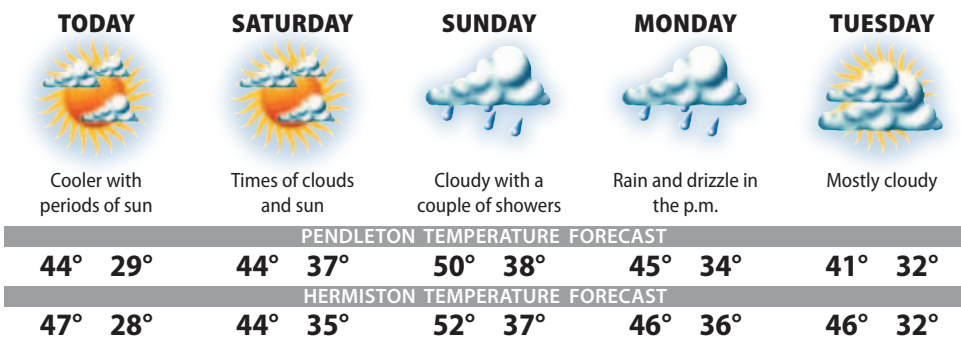
"With the correction, in all scenarios costs still outweigh benefits," Fraser said. "Therefore, the outcome ... would not have changed."

The Association of American Railroads declined comment on the agency's cost benefit calculations. Spokeswoman Jessica Kahanek said the move to rescind the Obama rule was in line with the requirements set forth by Congress.

John Risch, national legislative director for the International Association of Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation Workers, said electronic brakes are overdue and would have prevented some accidents, including the deaths at Lac-Megantic.

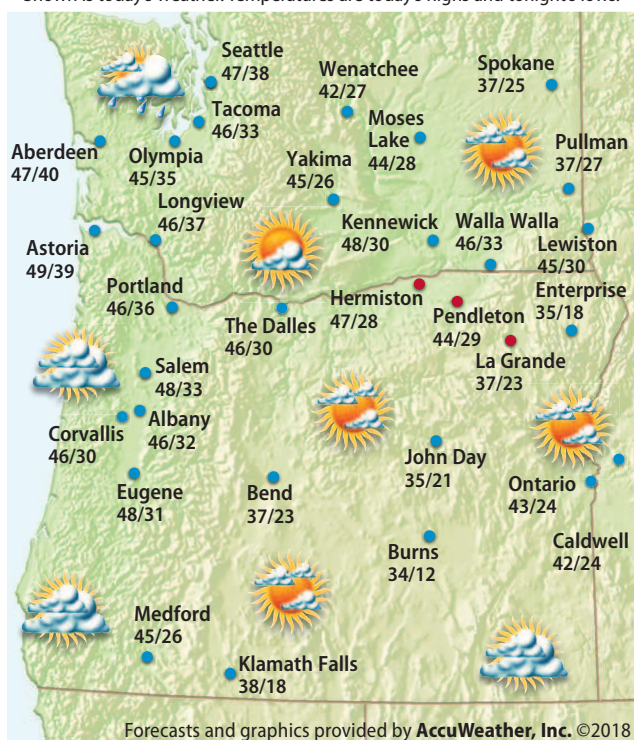
He added that the omission of some derailments from the government's findings further tilted a study that was already flawed.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



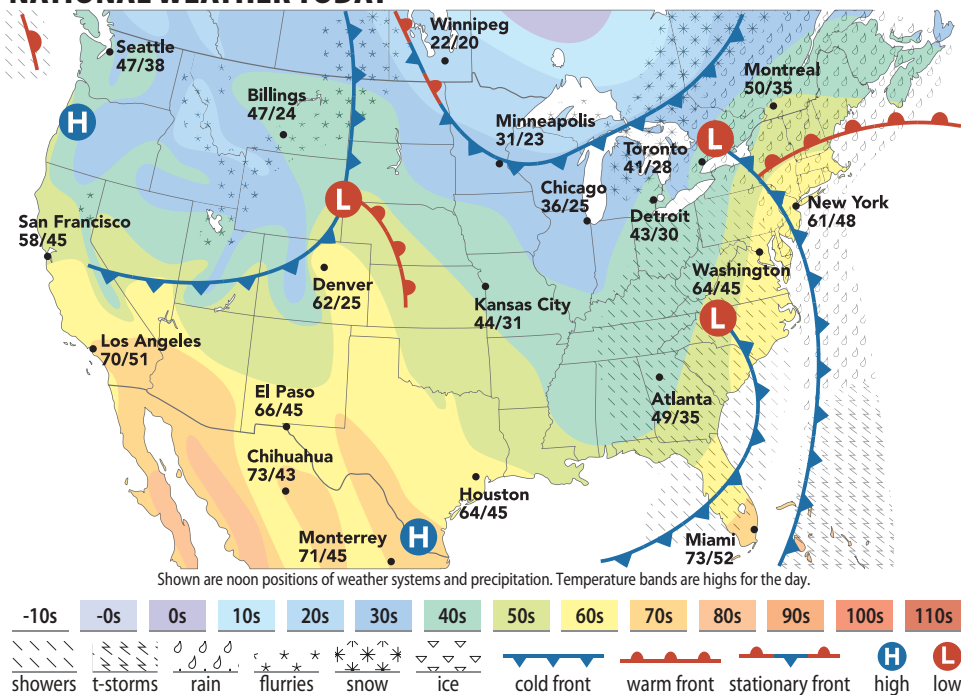
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	60°	43°
Normals	39°	25°
Records	66° (1900)	-12° (1990)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.61"	
Normal month to date	0.98"	
Year to date	9.48"	
Last year to date	15.46"	
Normal year to date	12.45"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	48°	34°
Normals	39°	27°
Records	63° (1933)	-12° (1990)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.36"	
Normal month to date	0.99"	
Year to date	7.32"	
Last year to date	8.91"	
Normal year to date	9.46"	
WINDS (in mph)		
Today	Sat.	
Boardman	WSW 7-14	NE 3-6
Pendleton	WSW 8-16	SE 6-12
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	7:33 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	4:14 p.m.	
Moonrise today	3:43 p.m.	
Moonset today	6:08 a.m.	
Full	Last	New
Dec 22	Dec 29	Jan 5
		Jan 13

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 87° in Marathon, Fla. Low -8° in Daniel, Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon likely to gain a sixth seat in the U.S. House, forecast shows

By **JEFF MAPES**
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon is still on track to gain a sixth seat in the U.S. House, according to elections experts studying new Census Bureau population estimates released Wednesday.

Kimball Brace of Election Data Services in Virginia said he projects that Oregon should gain another seat with about 140,000 people to spare. That's relatively close, but not as close to the margin as it is for some states.

"There are still some potential changes coming that could impact Oregon," he said. These include population changes caused by

a disaster or an economic shock — or big differences in what the Census Bureau turns up when it attempts to count the entire population in 2020.

Another firm, Polidata in Vermont, also projects that Oregon will gain a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Both firms project that Washington will continue to have 10 congressional seats. But they say California could lose a seat for the first time in its history.

Under current Oregon law, it will be up to the state Legislature to redraw district lines in 2021. And if Democrats maintain control of the Legislature, they will be able to send a bill

to Gov. Kate Brown — her term runs until early 2023 — even if Republicans object.

If legislators can't complete the job, the task goes to the federal courts.

In addition, several groups are pushing to take redistricting away from the Legislature and give it to some type of independent commission.

Oregon last gained a new congressional seat in 1980. Since then, the district lines have remained relatively unchanged. But an addition of a sixth seat could greatly scramble their boundaries.

Currently, Democrats hold four seats while Republicans have one.

Oregon Health Plan to end rationing of costly hepatitis C cure

MEDFORD (AP) — The Oregon Health Authority is expecting to lift requirements that led to rationing the use of a \$1,000-per-pill drug that can cure hepatitis C.

Most patients covered by the Oregon Health Plan had to have liver damage in order to qualify for the hepatitis C cure, the *Mail Tribune* reported Wednesday.

The state plans to lift that stipulation in March, allowing the treatment before people sustain liver damage from the disease.

About a quarter of the state's population is covered by the Oregon Health Plan. The state authority has estimated that 95,000 Oregon

residents have hepatitis C but about half don't know it.

New drugs released in 2013 and 2014 can cure most cases of the disease previously thought incurable, but the price tag caused problems.

Pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences charged \$84,000 for a 12-week treatment of Sovaldi, and it priced Harvoni at \$94,500.

Providing the drug to everyone with hepatitis C would have likely bankrupted the Oregon Health Plan and led to unaffordable premiums, health officials said.

"It was a complete bank-breaker. There was no way individual insurance plans or governments could afford

the pill where it was priced," said Jennifer Lind, CEO of Jackson Care Connect, a provider of Oregon Health Plan coverage.

The prices of the treatment are falling as more hepatitis C drugs and generics hit the market. Gilead Sciences announced in September that it will release a generic version of Harvoni in January, pricing it at \$24,000.

"As those prices have gone down, you've seen people getting more and more access to the drug," said Josh Balloch, vice president of government affairs for All-Care Health, another provider of Oregon Health Plan coverage.

Man struck, killed by MAX train in Hillsboro

HILLSBORO (AP) — A man was killed after being hit by a MAX train in Hillsboro.

Authorities say the eastbound train hit the man early Thursday morning 50 yards west

of Northeast Cornelius Pass Road at the start of a train overpass. Shuttle buses served area stations.

Sgt. Eric Bunday, a Hillsboro police spokesman, told *The Oregonian/OregonLive* that police were still trying to figure out why the man was on the tracks. The area doesn't have a pedestrian crossing, he said.

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211 S.E. Byers Ave., Pendleton 541-276-2211
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Multi-Media Consultants:

• Kimberly Macias
541-278-2683 • kmacias@eastoregonian.com
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COMMERCIAL PRINTING

Production Manager: Mike Jensen
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