

ODOT hopes big signs will have big impact

By **DICK MASON**
EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Elec-
tronic message boards
almost larger than life soon
may save lives on Interstate
84 between La Grande and
Pendleton.

The Oregon Department
of Transportation over the
next year plans to install
about a dozen electronic
message boards, some of
which are 10 feet tall and
span a width of 30 feet.

“They are meant to
improve safety during
adverse winter conditions,”
said ODOT spokesperson
Tom Strandberg.

Help with poor driv-
ing conditions is particu-
larly important in Northeast
Oregon, where bad weather
plays a role in about 60% of
serious crashes on Interstate
84, according to the trans-
portation department.

The size of the mes-
sage boards allows drivers
to see them from a greater
distance. This is import-
ant because the signs are
designed to rotate a series
of three messages, such
as information on weather
and roadway conditions,
warnings about crashes,
road construction activity
and more. Strandberg said
drivers would not have time
to read all the messages
if they were on smaller
boards.

The Snow Zone Safety
Project work will cost \$11
million, including \$4 mil-
lion from House Bill 2017,
also known as the Keep



Tom Strandberg, a public information officer for the Oregon Department of Transportation, examines some of the larger message boards his agency will install later this year along Interstate 84 in Northeast Oregon.

Oregon Moving Transpor-
tation Bill. The Oregon
Legislature approved the
bill in 2017.

The messages will come
from 10 new weather sta-
tions with sensors to detect
conditions and cameras to
provide visual information
to operators. The weather
stations’ sensors will mea-
sure the reflection of light
off of pavement to detect
ice, Strandberg said. A
dozen signs with flashing
lights warning of curves
also will be part of this
project.

Not all of the Snow Zone

Safety Project will involve
signs and message boards.
For example, an automated
gate at the westbound
on-ramp from exit 224, 16
miles west of Pendleton,
also will be part of the proj-
ect. The gate will allow for
faster closure of Interstate
84 when the weather is bad
and reduce the number of
vehicles entering the free-
way during hazardous con-
ditions, thus cutting down
the likelihood of a crash,
Strandberg said.

He said ODOT picked
exit 224 for the automatic
gate because of its remote

EO Media Group Photo/Dick Mason

location 5 miles west of
Deadman Pass, and it takes
state road crews longer to
reach that spot. And when
someone has to travel far
to shut a gate, he said, that
often means the worker
has less time to run a snow
plow.

Nonelectronic work for
the project includes the
installation of 9 miles of
guard cable between the
eastbound and westbound
lanes from Deadman Pass
and Meacham to near the
Spring Creek exit area
about 12 miles west of La
Grande.

BRIEFLY



Photo courtesy of the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office
East Umatilla County Fire and Rescue and the Umatilla County Sheriff's Office were assisted in reaching the crash scene by an employee of Umatilla Electric Cooperative.

Weston woman killed in snowmobile crash

WESTON — A
58-year-old woman from
Weston died in a snow-
mobile crash Wednes-
day evening while try-
ing to traverse winter
weather conditions to her
home, according to a press
release from the Umatilla
County Sheriff's Office.

JoLynn Lieuallen was
found dead when med-
ics arrived at the scene
on Lieuallen Road shortly
before 6 p.m.

The release stated that
East Umatilla County Fire
and Rescue and the sher-
iff's office were assisted
in reaching the scene by
snowmobile operators and
a snow cat operated by a
Umatilla Electric Cooper-
ative employee.

Family members said
Lieuallen had parked at
her mother's house on
Pine Creek Road and was
snowmobiling to her home
on Lieuallen Road due to
poor road conditions. A
family member became
worried after she didn't
check in and went to look
for her and discovered the
crash.

The medical examiner
has authorized release of
the body to Burns Mor-
tuary, according to the
release.

Hansell files for re-election

SALEM — Sen. Bill
Hansell made it official
Thursday morning.

The state senator from
A t h e n a officially
submitted
paperwork
to run for
re-election
in 2020 on
Thursday
morning.

He submitted the paper-
work in Salem while there
for legislative duty.

“I had made my inten-
tion known last fall,”
Hansell stated in a recent
news release. “It has been



Hansell

County approves East Umatilla ambulance loan

By **JESSICA POLLARD**
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The
East Umatilla County
Ambulance Area Health
District will soon have some
new equipment.

The Umatilla County
Board of Commissioners
approved a \$60,000 loan for
the health district to replace
a 13-year-old ambulance
with a cracked cylinder head
Wednesday night.

“We have to do a supple-
mental budget because we
didn't anticipate that this
year,” said Mark Moore, the
ambulance district adminis-
trator. “And we'll have to get
striping and badging on it.”

The district's 2006 Ford
Ambulance has been out of

commission for a few weeks,
and the costs to repair the
vehicle would have out-
weighed total replacement,
Moore said. He anticipates
the new rig will be ready
to roll in the next couple of
weeks.

Moore said the board of
directors will approve the
supplemental budget next
week.

The district, which covers
450 square miles encompass-
ing Athena, Weston, Adams
and Helix, had been relying
on its secondary ambulance,
a 1998 Chevrolet.

He said that while out
providing mutual aid to a
fatal snowmobile accident
Wednesday night, the Chev-
rolet broke down but crews
were able to get it back up

and running.

“We can't have sec-
ond-out vehicles doing these
calls,” he said.

Moore added that relying
on a single ambulance has
limited the district's ability
to provide mutual aid and
even respond to secondary
calls within the area.

The new ambulance,
a four-wheel drive 2019
Dodge Ram 3500, has about
3,000 miles on it, according
to Moore. The total cost is
more than \$147,000 and the
district said it intends to use
replacement funds to cover
\$57,000 of that cost.

Moore said the district
has applied for some grant
money in hopes of covering
the remaining \$31,000, but
that if no grants are awarded,

the district will dip into its
contingency fund instead.

The ambulance dis-
trict will repay the county
\$10,000 a year for six years
starting in 2021. But Uma-
tilla County Commissioner
John Shafer is hopeful that
East Umatilla Ambulance
could apply for grants to help
repay the debt sooner.

“It's one of our ambulance
districts, we didn't want to
see them unable to provide
service for the county,” Sha-
fer said. “I'm impressed with
how the district is managing
finances.”

Moore said the district
was thankful that the county
provided the loan.

“We're in a tight spot and
we don't have a lot of money
out here,” he said.

Portland-area man arrested on Pendleton kidnapping charge

East Oregonian

PENDLETON — A Port-
land-area man was lodged
Wednesday in the Uma-
tilla County Jail on multiple
charges related to a Pendle-
ton kidnapping incident.

Travis Ward, 27, who last
lived in Beaverton, accord-
ing to court documents, was
transported to the Umatilla
County Jail on a warrant fol-
lowing a secret indictment
issued in July 2019.

On July 25, 2019, a grand
jury formally accused
Ward of two misdemeanor
charges and five felonies
— including second-degree
kidnapping, which carries

a mandatory
minimum
sentence of
five years and
10 months.

Ward, according
to Pendleton
Police Chief
Stuart Roberts, traveled
to Pendleton on July 16 to
collect money owed by his
younger male cousin, who
was living in Pendleton at
the time.

According to the police
investigation, Ward unlaw-
fully entered a residence on
Southwest Sixth Street and
allegedly pointed a firearm
at his cousin to pressure



Ward

him into handing over the
money.

Unable to produce the
funds, the cousin led Ward
to his ex-girlfriend's work-
place, also in Pendleton.
Ward allegedly stole her
car from the parking lot
and drove back to Tigard,
where he and the stolen car
were found a few days later.

Court documents state
that Ward kidnapped his
cousin, and coerced both
victims.

In addition to first-de-
gree kidnapping and two
counts of coercion, Ward
faces a menacing and a
theft misdemeanor, as well
as a felony charge for unau-

thorized use of a motor
vehicle.

Roberts said it's possi-
ble that Ward has co-con-
spirators who may also be
charged in relation to the
incident, though no related
cases are listed in court
documents at this time.

Ward was extradited
to the jail from Washing-
ton County, where he was
recently indicted on sepa-
rate charges.

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