

# Trucker convoy heads through Eastern Oregon

By ALEX WITTMER  
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Alex Wittmer/EO Media Group, File

**Semitrailers line up at the Flying J Travel Center, La Grande, on Jan. 5, 2022. A nationwide protest convoy is making its way from Troutdale to Washington, D.C., starting Monday, March 1, 2022, and will pass through Eastern Oregon.**

PENDLETON — A nationwide protest will make its way through Eastern Oregon beginning Tuesday, March 1.

According to a flyer shared around social media, the American Freedom Convoy will head from Troutdale to Washington, D.C., stopping March 1 for the night at the Arrowhead Travel Plaza on the Umatilla Indian Reservation near Pendleton before driving along Interstate 84 and Interstate 80 on its way to the nation's capital. The convoy will contain a mix of vehicles and is not limited to semitrailers.

Residents of Baker and Union counties will be able to show their support for the convoy on March 2.

Paul Veluscek, a strong supporter of the convoy from Creswell said the spirit of the convoy will be about freedom, citing mask and vaccine mandates as the cause. The protest comes just after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced on Feb. 25 it was no longer recommending indoor mask mandates.

"It's all peaceful. It's all legal," Veluscek said. "They pulled permits or rented huge areas, venues where they can park along the way of these routes. It's almost a humanitarian effort. They're saying when we get to D.C., let's spread the love. Let's try to

take care of people."

Masks, vaccines and social distancing have been proven to be effective at curbing the spread of the virus, according to numerous scientific studies and virology experts.

Veluscek said he's looking forward to the trip.

"I wish it had happened earlier," he said. "I just want to see as many people stand up and do something. It's been too long."

The convoy will pass through La Grande and Baker City before briefly stopping in Boise and continuing on to Little America, Wyoming.

Joining the convoy will be country music singer Jessie Leigh, an Estacada native who was flying back from Nashville to join the protest,

along with carrying a special American flag given to her by a close friend that she hopes will inspire people on the road.

"The goal and mission is to have this particular flag used for unity and to be touched by as many Americans as possible and to unify people," she said. "Despite what side of the aisle, it doesn't matter. We're all Americans. We're all human, and we all stand together. And for at least a moment, we can stand under the flag and sing a song together."

Leigh said a break in her schedule is what allowed her to join the convoy.

"We have these open dates on the schedule and they reached out to ask if we would be the caretakers of the flag on

this convoy," she said.

American Freedom Convoy is an offshoot of several other protests across the nation against vaccine and mask mandates due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The convoy follows weeks after truckers in Ottawa, Canada, shut down commerce and traffic in the city.

A separate convoy, The People's Convoy, already started driving toward Washington, D.C., and is scheduled to reach Indianapolis by March 1.

The American Freedom Convoy is scheduled to arrive at Peoria, Illinois, on March 5. Afterward, the convoy will rendezvous with other participating truckers from across the nation.

# Morrow County ditches dispatch of Boardman EMS

By ERICK PETERSON  
East Oregonian

BOARDMAN — The Boardman Fire Rescue District in a press release Friday, Feb. 25, announced the Morrow County Sheriff's Office no longer dispatches the district to medical calls.

Morrow County Sheriff Ken Matlack on Feb. 28 said meetings were planned for this week to resolve this situation. He added that Boardman residents are not likely to see a difference in emergency services in the meantime.

"All of Boardman Fire calls are being sent to them," he said. "All incidents on the freeway, accidents, gas spills, chemical spills, anything to do with the fire department, everything hasn't changed at all."

He explained all emergency service entities have the ability to monitor one another's radio traffic, including calls for emergency medical services. The fire department monitors the traffic, and it can respond.

The only difference, he said, is the fire department is now not relying on the sheriff office's dispatch to respond to emergencies.

"Right now, we don't have any decision-making, if they want to self-initiate and go and do what they would typically do or standby. Whatever they feel they're going to do, that's their decision," Matlack said.

He stated this is a temporary situation.

Matlack informed Boardman Fire Rescue District Chief Hughes on Feb. 22 about the change, according to the press release, due to a complaint from Donna Sherma, the emergency medical services coordinator of the Morrow County Health District had with the

way fire district's personnel provided medical treatment to a patient.

However, according to the press release, neither Matlack nor Sherman have been willing to provide sufficient details for the fire district to investigate this complaint.

Matlack said he would not give details about the complaint at this time.

Boardman Fire Rescue District reported that since March 16, 2020, it has responded to 630 fire calls and an additional 814 EMS calls.

The fire district requires all full-time firefighters to be state licensed emergency medical technicians or higher and provides 24/7 service from the Boardman fire station, according to the press release, with assistance from volunteer firefighters/emergency medical technicians.

"The Boardman Fire Rescue District has set and maintained a minimum response time of 90 seconds or less for staff to be en route to emergency calls, from the Boardman station," the release stated. "This allows the fire district to provide the highest level of care and assistance to the community in times of emergency or crisis."

Neither the Morrow County Sheriff's Office nor the Morrow County Health District manage the fire district. Instead, an elected board of directors oversees the district.

"The Boardman Fire Rescue District is diligently trying to work out the issues at hand in order to continue to provide the best emergency medical care when seconds matter," according to the press release. "Public safety and patient care is our highest priority."

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Pendleton starts upgrades on S.E. Byers Avenue

PENDLETON — City of Pendleton crews began work Monday, Feb. 28, on Southeast Byers Avenue.

Pendleton Public Works Director Bob Patterson in a press release reported the

work is related to storm system upgrades from Main Street to Southeast Seventh Street and water system upgrades from Main Street to Southeast Fourth Street.

The city anticipates the project will be ongoing through March and April and is completing the work in preparation of the Southeast Byers Avenue recon-

struction project later in 2022.

City staff will communicate with affected property owners during this construction, according to Patterson. The city will set up traffic control and detours, and the work involves periodic closures of intersections along Southeast Byers Avenue.

City crews will try to maintain access to all properties as the utility work allows.

Once they complete the work on Byers, crews will move on to Northwest Despain Avenue. Patterson said the city will provide more information on that project in the future.

—EO Media Group

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