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High gas prices hit local public transit

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — For public transit agencies across Eastern Oregon, rising gas prices are a double-edged sword.

The high global price of oil means Oregonians are paying an average of \$4.68 per gallon to keep their vehicles fueled, according to AAA. While public transportation agencies in Umatilla and Morrow counties haven't yet seen data for March, they're starting to see some anecdotal evidence that residents might be hopping on a bus more often to avoid paying the price at the pump.

J.D. Tovey, who oversees Kayak Public Transit as the planning director for the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, said he expects Kayak to see a bump in March based on an increase in inquiries about routes and schedules. Pendleton finance director Linda Carter said she's noticed more of her employees have started riding on the city's Let'er Bus public transit instead of driving to work.

It's a welcome rebound after a couple of tough years for public transit. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, Tovey said Kayak lost about two-thirds of its ridership between 2019 and 2020, recovering slightly in 2021 but still nowhere near pre-pandemic levels.

While some residents might seek refuge from high gas prices in public transportation, buses aren't shielded from the rising cost of fuel themselves. Katie Imes, the transportation coordinator for Morrow County, said her proposed budget for the next fiscal year will be larger in anticipation of higher fuel prices.

Carter said the city doesn't just cover 100% of the fuel costs associated with Let'er Bus, but also provides reimbursements for its subsidized taxi ticket program for disabled and low-income residents. The city's taxi ticket contractor, Elite Taxi, covers its own fuel costs up to \$2 per gallon, but the city is required to reimburse Elite an additional 25 cents for every 50 cents above that \$2 threshold.

Tovey said the CTUIR has explored adding vehicles that run on electricity or alternative fuels to its fleet, but even if the tribes acquire the vehicles and develop the infrastructure to sustain them, they likely would run on Kayak's intra-city routes, such as the Hermiston Area Regional Transit, which Kayak operates on behalf of the city of Hermiston.

Pendleton, Morrow County and Kayak all run on a fare-free system, meaning they can't pass on increased operational costs

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▲ From left, guest Kayla Henshaw talks with Ryan Smith and Shannon Hartley on March 30, 2022, for an edition of their podcast The Eastern Oregon Connection. Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

IT'S THE TALK OF THE TOWN

Local podcast puts focus on The Eastern Oregon Connection

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Shannon Hartley and Ryan Smith are trying to turn the art of a small-town conversation into a podcast.

The pair of long-time friends are behind The Eastern Oregon Connection, an interview series where Hartley and Smith talk with various community members about their life and times.

"We're celebrating small-town community," Smith said in an interview. "We're having conversations with people to share their stories. It's not necessarily one set of people. These are business owners. They're going to be people involved in charities and local events that are going on that we want to talk about."

The duo have varied professional and personal histories.

Hartley grew up in Pendleton but only recently returned after initially leaving for college. He attended East-

ern Oregon University in La Grande before transferring to University of Oregon, where he did a stint cleaning metalsmithing labs. After graduating from college, he stuck in Eugene as an admissions officer for Bushnell University, a small liberal arts college. He worked in marketing for a book publisher and became a real estate agent upon his return to Pendleton.

Smith was born in Pendleton, raised in Salem and returned to Pendleton a few years before graduating high school. He worked at the Pepsi bottling plant in Pendleton during high school and transferred to the plant in La Grande while attending college at EOU. He graduated with a degree in business and worked in accounting before settling in his job at McLaughlin Landscaping.

Both Hartley and Smith graduated from Pendleton High School in 2010, and with their wives acting as best friends, they stayed connected through the years.

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PENDLETON CITY COUNCIL

New 'forward thinking' candidate joins race

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton City Council candidate Addison Schulberg wasn't supposed to stay in Pendleton.

When he graduated from Willamette University in 2014, he anticipated resettling in Portland like many of his peers were doing. Instead, he returned to his hometown of Pendleton.

"I came back with an intent to stay here for a year and then just kind of re-fell in love with the town as an adult, rather than having that kind of disdain for your hometown as a teenager," he said.

Since 1980, Schulberg's parents, Carol Hanks and Ken Schulberg,

have owned and operated the Great Pacific Wine & Coffee Co. at 403 S. Main St. After returning to Pendleton, the younger Schulberg became involved in the family business and one day intends to take over the popular restaurant.

He also now is getting more involved in the city's civic life.

After receiving some encouragement from friends, Schulberg filed to run for an at-large seat on the Pendleton City Council that's being vacated by Councilor Jake Cambier, who declined to run for reelection. With no one else filing to run against Schulberg, he's all but assured victory in the May 17 election.

Schulberg said he has strong opinions about many local issues, but since he's still a layman, he wants to use his early time on the council to listen and learn. He said he's aligned with the city council's goals, especially since he's encountered many of the issues it's trying to tackle as a business owner.

Take the issue of the lack of housing in Pendleton. Schulberg said he's losing two good employees because their rent became too expensive and they couldn't find another suitable place to live. He added he was excited that Pendleton was becoming an in-demand place to live, pointing out that growth at the Pendleton Unmanned Aerial Systems Range was

bringing new people to town. But he wanted the city to continue leveraging land and incentives to increase the housing stock within the city.

Before the pandemic, one of the more frequent points of discussion was how the city should respond to a growing population of unhoused residents. While there's been less discussion at the council level in recent months, it's not an issue that's gone away.

Over the cold weather months, Schulberg said staff discovered that two people were sleeping near the Great Pacific doorway at night. Rather than trying to force them to vacate, Schulberg said he spoke with

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