

Transit:

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to riders. Instead, all three agencies rely on the State Transportation Improvement Fund — a payroll tax funded program that helps pay for local public transportation — and a series of state and federal grants. While all three expressed confidence they could absorb the costs with their funding, Tovey said he wants to continue to track his budget once pandemic relief money runs out.

Besides rising fuel prices, local public transportation agencies are facing other economic challenges. A worker-friendly labor market means the agencies are raising salaries to compete for drivers. And supply chain issues mean acquiring new buses is a much more difficult prospect.

That's especially a challenge for Morrow County and Kayak. Morrow County's bus service, The Loop, operates as a dial-a-ride that transports residents throughout the county and once-per-week trips to Hermiston. Kayak runs regional routes that connect Pendleton with Hermiston, La Grande and Walla Walla.

Both agencies are prepared to partner on a fixed route that connects Hermiston with the Port of Morrow, but Tovey said its start is contingent on adding new buses to cover the route. Imes said she's hopeful the route can start in 2023, but it could take much longer if they aren't able to get buses delivered in time.

Public transportation in Umatilla and Morrow counties has grown considerably during the past decade, but



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Two riders board a Kayak Public Transit bus Monday, April 4, 2022, near Walmart in Pendleton. The bus system anticipates an increase in riders as gas prices remain high.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

A city of Pendleton Let'er Bus cruises up Southwest Dorion Avenue on Tuesday, April 5, 2022. Pendleton finance director Linda Carter says she noticed more of her employees started riding on the city's public transit instead of driving to work.

in many places, owning a car remains necessary to access jobs and important services. Regardless of the price of gas, Imes said public transportation is important to the region.

"I know a lot of other

people that live in rural Oregon, that live here because they love the lifestyle," she said. "They don't want to be in the big cities. They want to be out in the country, and public transit should be available for all those people that

decide to live in rural areas. They should have access to the same medical care, the same employment opportunities, the same shopping ... and all those things that are more accessible in highly urban areas."

Candidate:

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them to figure out a way to coexist. The pair continued to sleep near the restaurant at nights, but were grateful for the conversation and didn't give Great Pacific any major issues before moving on when the weather warmed up.

"We showed them respect, and then they showed us respect," he said.

He said addressing homelessness is a complex issue, but he wants Pendleton to try novel ideas rather than reattempt strategies that haven't

been successful elsewhere.

Winning a seat on the city council also will garner Schulberg a seat on the Pendleton Development Commission, the body that oversees the urban renewal district, the downtown-focused district that provides economic aid to various businesses and organizations.

Schulberg said Great Pacific is in the process of trying to obtain grants and loans from the commission. He hopes to have them wrapped up before he takes office, but if not, he plans to recuse himself of any discussion involving the restaurant.

Should Schulberg be sworn in as expected in Janu-

ary 2023, it will represent a generational shift on the council, a majority of which are retirees. Schulberg, 30, will join Councilors McKennon McDonald and Sally Brandsen as members under the age of 40.

Schulberg doesn't expect his age, or any of the other councilor's age, to affect the way he governs. Instead, he wants "forward thinking" to define his time on the council.

"I'm interested in thoughtfully growing Pendleton," Schulberg said, "while maintaining livability and quality of life, and improving things for those who are already here."

Schulberg is the only newcomer in the candidate field. Incumbents McDonald, Carole Innes, Linda Neuman and Steve Campbell



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian

Podcaster Ryan Smith, left, listens to guest Kayla Henshaw on March 30, 2022, for an edition of The Eastern Oregon Connection.

Talk:

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When Smith had the idea to start some sort of community podcast, he reached out to Hartley. Hartley had done a sports podcast in the past, so the inquiries originally revolved around equipment and setup.

But Hartley himself had been considering starting some sort of community-minded project, maybe a YouTube video or Instagram post that would also act as a promotional tool for his real estate business.

With their interest aligned, they decided to partner up and The Eastern Oregon Connection was born.

The concept behind the podcast is that people may think they know their neighbors, but when given the chance for locals to unwind over a couple of hours, they may reveal interesting new stories about themselves.

"It's pretty rare even in a small-town community that you actually get to hear someone's story and their thoughts on things for that amount of time," Hartley said.

For their first few guests, Smith and Hartley targeted recognizable names, including Dean Fouquette, former owner of Dean's Pendleton Athletic, and Debbie Kishpaugh, the coach of Rhythmic Mode, the vaunted Pendleton High School

dance team. While the first spate of guests has been heavy on Pendletonians, the pair want to extend their reach to interviews with guests from the surrounding area, including Hermiston, Milton-Freewater and La Grande. They'd also like to focus on new business owners in need of a little extra publicity or people behind worthy charitable causes.

"We enjoy getting to know people," he said. "At the heart of things, it's just really a lot of fun, because these are people that we know fairly well, but we are learning so much from each person just by visiting with them."

Podcasts are becoming an increasingly popular form of media. According to an article in Forbes, an estimated 100 million people listened to a podcast monthly in 2020. However, there aren't too many podcasts focused on Eastern Oregon, and Smith and Hartley occasionally had to educate some of their guests on what podcasts were and how they could listen to them.

As of March 25, Smith and Hartley said they had more than 350 total plays on their podcast episodes and had an established audience of 70 listeners. Given that they've done little promotion of the show as they juggle The Eastern Oregon Connection with their day jobs and home lives, the pair are hopeful it will continue to grow.

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