

Boutique:

Continued from Page A1

“The EAS contract and bid process for Pendleton has been accelerated and moved from later in the year to now, seven months early,” he said. The bids were due April 11.

“The DOT received one bid for our EAS Service,” Honemann said. “That respondent was Boutique Airlines.”

The East Oregonian left messages for local Boutique Air manager Shawn Simpson, but as of deadline Monday, April 18, he had not offered a comment.

Passenger numbers on the rise

The number of passengers boarding for the small airline hit 447 in March in Pendleton, the most since February 2020, the start of the pandemic, which had 541, according to data from Honemann.

“There was an obvious decrease in enplanements in early 2020 when the country went into pandemic response mode, and some recovery later in 2020 and into 2022,” he said.

Boutique in 2019 at Pendleton, he reported, had a total of 6,763 passengers. Then ridership plunged as the pandemic ramped up, with the airline recording 343 passengers in March of that year and just 58 in April. That was the low point, though, according to the data.

Since then, Boutique Air’s passenger count has been climbing, with occasional dips punctuating the trend.

“We are not at pre-pandemic enplanements, lagging (more than) 25% compared to averaged pre-pandemic enplanements,” Honemann said.

Boutique in November and December 2021 carried 416 and then 399 passengers, but in January the numbers



Charly Hotchkiss/East Oregonian

An airport employee helps prepare a Boutique Air flight for takeoff during a hailstorm Thursday, April 14, 2022, at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport, Pendleton.

dropped 297. Honemann said that was not due to the coronavirus.

“January 2022 was a rough month for weather in Pendleton and Portland,” he explained, “(with) low ceiling, freezing fog conditions, snow ... Weather cancellations were the primary cause of that dip.”

Honemann offered some industry context about Boutique’s termination notice.

“Skywest, a major EAS provider,” he said, “also submitted a Notice of Termination of Service to the DOT for 29 communities, citing similar economic challenges.”

Honemann also said he does not think recent developments at the Walla Walla Regional Airport are going to dent Boutique’s numbers.

Alaska Air Group, parent company of Alaska Airlines, is planning to transition from turboprop planes to full-jet aircraft for its Horizon Air services sometime in 2023.

The Embraer 175 jet aircraft will be the newest addition to the airport, replacing the turboprop Bombardier Q-400, which has served passengers for many years and is considered a good workhorse

aircraft for regional flights.

The Port of Walla Walla is preparing now for the switch, with a facilities remodel to accommodate the new planes.

But Horizon’s flights out of Walla Walla go to Seattle, Honemann said, not to Portland. He said “there is little to zero competition” so the platform shift for service of the Walla Walla to Seattle route won’t have an effect on enplanements or operations at Pendleton.

Praise for Boutique

Honemann said he is pleased with Boutique, which maintains the second-largest fleet of Pilatus PC-12 single turboprops in the country.

“I really like our level of service and provider, Boutique, and think it is a great model for the needs of our community,” he said. “No TSA. (Pendleton to Portland) in under an hour. Three round-trip flights a day. Excellent airframe and platform. Feels like you are flying private.”

On April 18, Honemann updated progress on the contract award process.

“Last week, DOT got one bid (from Boutique) for a two-year contract. We’re

now gathering statements of support from the community,” he said. “Those need to be in by May 3. I don’t see any issues in the award process. We should have uninterrupted service with the same provider. I think that’s a good thing.”

Pendleton Economic Development Director Steve Chrisman said airlines have been having a rough go.

“Boutique had staffing shortages even before the pandemic,” he said. “The contract was made well in advance, so there were also wage issues. When COVID hit, the big airlines encouraged early retirement, but business recovered a lot faster than expected. They needed to get more staff, and where else than from the little airlines?”

Long-term, however, he said, Boutiques service in Pendleton “will be healthier and more reliable under the new contract.”

Honemann said the next step for the airport and airport commission is to provide a statement/comment for the formal record. The commission meets in the Doolittle Raiders Conference Room on Wednesday, April 20, at 6 p.m.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, File

Elite Taxi vehicles await fares April 5, 2022, at 332 S.E. Dorion Ave., Pendleton. Pendleton City Council at its meeting Tuesday, April 19, considers a new ordinance to allow ride-hail companies, such as Uber, to coexist with taxis.

Uber:

Continued from Page A1

Kerns and finance director Linda Carter wrote the strict state requirements for running those programs means it can be difficult to find providers for them.

“Protection of the provision for public transportation, rather than promotion of free enterprise, is authorized by the state,” they wrote. “The city has a strong interest and is obligated to make sure that transportation providers are available to the public.”

Staff also is asking the council to act on the issue with urgency. Passing an ordinance is usually a weeks-long process: the council usually has the title of the ordinance read aloud at a meeting and then waits two weeks or more for their next scheduled meeting to hold a public hearing and consider approval.

Staff is encouraging the council to expedite that process significantly. Under the city charter, the council can use a series of votes to get around their usual meeting requirements: a majority vote to consolidate the readings into one meeting, a unanimous vote to hold a public hearing and then another unanimous vote to pass the ordinance. If the final vote doesn’t achieve unanimity, the council could approve it by majority vote at its next meeting.

The new ordinance only has a five-month lifespan before it automatically expires. Near the end of the five months, the council is expected to evaluate the ordinance based on whether it “protects the public” and if it can meet the city’s transportation needs and offer new modes of transportation without harming the city’s contractor.

Should the council approve the ordinance on Tuesday, the pilot program would run through Pendleton’s event season, including Pendleton Bike Week, Pendleton Whisky Music Fest and the Round-Up.

It won’t take nearly as much procedural effort for the council to consider a bid to do street overlay projects this summer.

City officials didn’t know how supply chain issues and soaring oil prices might affect street construction costs, but the \$1.3 million bid from American Rock Products of Pendleton was well below the city’s estimate. The bid will cover overlays and reconstruction projects at 19 blocks around town, mostly roads that front residential properties.

The council also considers approving a bid of \$362,581 from Doolittle Construction of Snoqualamie, Washington, for slurry seal work. A slurry seal acts as a filling for cracks and gaps in asphalt and helps extend the life of streets in good condition.

Dam:

Continued from Page A1

The administration is contacting stakeholders to get more information to understand the system and process, said Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

“We continue to be engaged with the administration at CEQ,” Hennings said. “Looking at the blog, we would have liked to see more focus on the impact this would have had on farmers across the country.”

It’s important for farmers to remain fully engaged in educating the decision-makers, Hennings said.

“We have to keep in mind that farmers are facing significant disruptions already, including drought, input costs, the supply chain and rail reliability,” she said. “This would just cause another major disruption in our transportation system, which would be very harmful to the wheat farmer.”

The Biden administration is focused on infrastructure,

Hennings said.

“We appreciate that they have reached out to stakeholders to have discussions to better understand what’s happening,” she said.

“There are a lot of unknowns about this CEQ process but Farm Bureau is keeping an eye on this process,” said Sean Ellis, spokesman for the Idaho Farm Bureau. “CEQ is one of several conversations taking place right now on this issue and we’re continuing to watch all of these processes. We continue to monitor the situation with the lower Snake River dams and will respond as necessary.”

Farmers support salmon recovery, but want a solution that will benefit all stakeholders instead of harming one more than others, Hennings said.

The wheat industry is concerned, but there are members of Congress who understand the importance of the dams, Hennings said.

“One of the cleanest modes of transportation is barging, not putting 150,000 trucks back on the road,” she said.

Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commis-

sion, questioned the continued focus on removal of the four Snake River dams, long a target of environmental groups. He noted that the federal government recently conducted a four-year study of the Columbia-Snake River operating system, in addition to a state and federal assessment from Washington Sen. Patty Murray and Gov. Jay Inslee.

“I think there’s some questions about, what is this that CEQ is now doing?” he said. “Is it information, data, is there science, are they just getting everybody’s opinions?”

Squires wonders if efforts could ultimately go beyond the four dams.

The blog discusses introducing salmon into blocked areas.

“We don’t know if that means installing fish ladders, which the Snake River already has fish ladders, or if that implies taking out all the other dams for reintroduction,” he said.

Idaho Farm Bureau will continue to support its members’ position in support of those lower Snake River dams, as well as all dams, Ellis said.

my own hands, rather than sit back and complain about what another candidate is or is not doing, or what they can or cannot do.”

McCloud said he could be the candidate to unify Oregon’s growing political divide between rural Oregonians and those living in the Portland-metro areas, and that he wanted to help heal the rift between Eastern Oregonians who may feel like they have been left out of Oregon’s political process by the Democratic majority in Portland.

“They’ve been neglected. They have not been viewed as important, and, at the same time, we’re finding that our rural communities are subjected to harmful stereotypes,” he said. “So I think it’s important, as somebody who is going around traveling, talking to people, meeting with them, listening to their stories, that I have an opportunity to stand in the gap and really help clarify and repair

some of the perception that Oregonians have developed about each other.”

McCloud also levied his status as the first Black Republican gubernatorial candidate in Oregon as a way to help bridge those same political divides.

“I have some separation from the other candidates in that typical language that’s generally used when we talk about extremist policies, it will not apply to me,” he said. “I think that’s an advantage that I have.”

While McCloud has no previous government experience, the decision to run for governor was not taken lightly, he said.

“I was with my 13-year-old daughter, and I had finished typing out the filing paperwork,” he said. “And I said to her, ‘Should I do this?’ And she is actually the one that pressed the submit button, and let me know that my family was behind me 100%”

Governor:

Continued from Page A1

Oregon, along with Washington and California, lead the nation in timber production. According to Oregon Forest Resources Institute, Oregon leads the nation in producing softwoods and plywood products, with more than 28% of U.S. plywood products being made in Oregon.

McCloud decided to join the race after being disappointed with the current lineup of gubernatorial candidates.

“Before I was a candidate, I was an Oregon voter who looked across the spectrum of candidates to see the one that I felt would represent not just me and my values, but who was the one that had the ability to unify the state of Oregon,” he said. “And after some time observing and listening, I felt that it was important for me to attempt to take matters into

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