

No new federal funds for highway enhancements

BY PETER WONG

Oregon Capital Bureau

The Oregon Transportation Commission has decided that the state's share of flexible funds from the federal government should not go toward new highway "enhancements."

The commission directed the staff of the Oregon Department of Transportation to revise its options. About \$400 million in transportation money from the federal infrastructure bill, which President Joe Biden signed on Nov. 15, will be divided among maintenance projects for roads and bridges, safe routes to school and improvements on state highways that function as main streets in communities.

The commission heard more comments at a meeting Thursday, March 10, after which members refined what had been four scenarios for spending \$214 million of the \$412 million in flexible funds.

"We are committed to preserving the existing transportation network and investing in a range of improvements to reduce congestion and harmful emissions, and to support improved safety, electric vehicles, transit and local improvements," commission Chairman Robert Van Brocklin said. "The



Semitrailers in August 2020 cruise on Interstate 84 through the Ladd Canyon area. Tom Strandberg/Oregon Department of Transportation, File

proposed scenarios will allow ODOT to invest in Oregon's transportation system in these and other important ways."

The commission will decide March 30 on the exact mix to be divided among the list of

maintenance projects, known as Fix-It, plus safe routes to school and improved highways that function as main streets. It will decide money afterward for specific projects within these categories; some projects

will start this summer.

The \$400 million-plus is part of Oregon's \$1.2 billion that will come to the Department of Transportation over the next five years.

This amount counts about

\$800 million that the federal law earmarks for specific purposes, such as bridge repairs, charging stations for electric vehicles and programs to reduce greenhouse gases.

It excludes about \$200 million that larger metropolitan areas will get for transportation directly from the federal government. It also excludes money for broadband, water and sewer line upgrades that will not go through ODOT. Transit agencies also will share \$200 million they will get directly.

Other uses

Other uses of the rest of the state's \$198 million in flexible funds, as proposed by ODOT staff in all scenarios, are:

- \$100 million for ODOT to carry out new access projects to comply with a 2017 settlement of a lawsuit under the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- \$40 million to help offset a projected shortfall in agency operations and maintenance.
- \$40 million to enable Oregon to compete with other states for a share of \$100 billion that the U.S. Department of Transportation will award for other projects. Possible Oregon contenders are two

projects on Interstate 5: Rose Quarter widening and partial capping, and a new bridge over the Columbia River to connect Portland with Vancouver, Washington. (The federal law has a separate fund for projects reconnecting communities, but it is just \$1 billion nationally.)

• \$15 million to help communities with planning for climate change, including the transportation planning rule that seeks to reduce the need for travel between home, work and other activities. The rule dates back to 1991, but was updated in 2012.

• \$3 million to boost business and the workforce required for construction projects.

These numbers also could change as the commission makes its final decisions.

The amounts available to ODOT for new highway enhancements will drop off sharply after 2024, seven years after the Legislature approved its third major funding plan in two decades under House Bill 2017. The plan increased fuel taxes, which ODOT and local governments spend on maintenance, and raised some vehicle and license fees to repay bonds for construction.

Idaho hospital briefly locks down amid far-right call for protest

BY REBECCA BOONE

Associated Press

BOISE — A major Boise hospital went on lockdown for about an hour Tuesday, March 15, after far-right activist Ammon Bundy urged supporters to go to the facility in protest of a child protection case involving one of his family friends.

St. Luke's Health System put the Boise Medical Center on lockdown and began diverting incoming patients about 1:30 p.m. on Tuesday.

"Safety is our top priority," the hospital said in a statement. "At this time, anyone in need of care should seek alternative health care providers and options. We ask that people please avoid the area near the Boise hospital until further notice."

Several police cars from the Idaho State Police and Boise

Police Department responded to the hospital for the protest.

A few dozen protesters stationed themselves outside various hospital doors and buildings, some speculating on social media about whether the facility could be accessed via underground tunnels. The protesters appeared to mostly stay on sidewalks, however, and the lockdown was lifted shortly before 3 p.m.

Earlier in the day, Bundy released a statement on YouTube warning that if an acquaintance's young child was not returned to the family after a hearing Tuesday afternoon, that "patriot groups" would take action.

Bundy later released another video telling people that child protection workers were poised to move the baby from the

hospital to a foster home, and telling them to show up at the facility immediately.

The baby was temporarily removed from family custody last Friday, March 11, after officials determined the 10-month-old was "suffering from severe malnourishment" and at risk of injury or death, according to a statement from police in the city of Meridian near Boise.

The baby's parents had refused to let officers check on the child's welfare after the family canceled a medical appointment, the police statement said.

Bundy, who is well-known for participating in armed standoffs with law enforcement, was arrested the following day on a misdemeanor trespassing charge after he

protested at a different hospital where he believed the baby was being treated.

Bundy's People's Rights group has characterized the intervention as "medical kidnapping" and "child trafficking" on social media platforms.

In an earlier YouTube video, Bundy asked followers to protest at the homes of child protection service workers, law enforcement officers and others involved in the protection case.

"I'm not OK with any of this — to be honest with you if justice was to be served, we would go into the hospital, take that baby and we would give it back to their mother," Bundy said.

He added: "And if we were further to administrate justice, we would find those that are accountable and we would prosecute them, and uh, you

know, make them pay for the damages that they caused for this family and assure that this never happened again. That's what should happen."

Still, he said people should wait until after a hearing scheduled for 1 p.m. that was expected to determine if the child could immediately return home.

"This judge, if he doesn't return this family back, knowing and seeing the information that is out there ... if he doesn't straighten this out, then we may have to straighten it out for him," Bundy said. "And that's not going to be pretty. It's going to be difficult."

In the video made later that day, Bundy characterized the situation as an emergency and directed people to the Boise hospital because he said the

baby was going to be taken to a foster home.

Bundy, who is running as an independent candidate in a crowded race to be Idaho's next governor, didn't attend the protest himself. He was at the Ada County Courthouse all day, standing trial on charges of misdemeanor trespassing and resisting or obstructing officers in connection with an incident last year in which he showed up at the Idaho Statehouse despite being banned from the building after a previous trespassing arrest.

Bundy is representing himself in the case. He declined to present witnesses or offer opening statements during the trial, the Idaho Statesman reported. Jurors were still deliberating on a verdict Tuesday evening.

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