

## The Oregonian

### Portland's roads: Commissioner Steve Novick releases new poll, says he's 'probably' going to support new street fee

*By Andrew Theen*

Portland Commissioner Steve Novick said Thursday he feels “a real sense of urgency” to do something to address the city’s transportation network, and an \$8 to \$12 monthly street fee is the best short-term solution.

The commissioner held a press conference Thursday to show the latest poll results from DHM Research, conducted on behalf of the Portland Bureau of Transportation. It’s the second poll on transportation needs this year, with the first survey focused on what improvements residents want to see to the city’s roads.

An \$8 per month street fee would raise up to \$34 million per year, and a \$12 fee option could bring in \$52 million in revenue annually, according to PBOT officials. An audit last year said the city needs to spend \$70 million per year for a decade to make sure streets are up to standards.

Novick said Portland needs to make a dent in the deferred maintenance of city streets. “It’s not that much,” he said Thursday of the potential revenue from a street fee, “but it’s a heckuva lot more than we’re doing now.” Novick said that revenue could help the city make great strides in improvement safety.

The phone poll of 800 Portlanders conducted in recent weeks showed tepid support at best for a street fee at either price, with support ranging from 44 – 47 percent. Nearly twice as many respondents said they were strongly opposed to the fee than those that strongly supported it.

But Novick and DHM pollster John Horvick said once the respondents learned more about what the money would do, support increased. The city wants to install flashing pedestrian beacons on dangerous streets, set aside money to make one Willamette River bridge seismically sound, and build sidewalks and other projects deemed a priority by residents.

Support for both scenarios, the \$8 and \$12 fee, jumped to “majority support” according to the poll results, at 51 and 52 percent respectively, after respondents learned about those potential projects.

Novick said the poll clearly showed the street fee is the more preferable funding measure compared to an income tax, sales tax or bond measure.

“We seem to have gotten a pretty strong answer that most people prefer a monthly fee to those other options,” he said.

Novick, who once described the \$35 arts tax as “beyond regressive,” acknowledged Thursday that he was “a fan of the income tax” option but the opposition was too “overwhelming” to move forward.

“If it was really close,” he said of poll responses, “I might be pushing for an income-tax based system.”

The city is looking at ways to mitigate the burden on low-income residents, and is looking at scenarios where revenue would help pay for transit improvements in low-income neighborhoods.

Both the \$8 and \$12 tax revenue estimates factor in heavy contributions from the business community.

How the city plans to administer any future fee remains unclear, but 52 percent of respondents opposed tacking on the fee to existing water and sewer bills.

Younger and more wealthy respondents were actually more likely to support adding the fee to the utility bill.

Novick said he needs to discuss the road fee with his City Council colleagues, but said given the sense of urgency, council needs to have a recommended funding measure sometime in the next few months.

"The longer we wait, the worse things get," Novick said.

The proposal doesn't need to be sent to the ballot for voter approval.

"At a transportation town hall earlier this year, Mayor Charlie Hales said his preference was to proceed with enacting a new funding stream after vetting and bringing the measure to residents at town halls.

On Thursday, Novick said Portlanders need to understand that property tax revenue primarily go to parks, police and fire services.

"He pointed to the costs needed to keep an automobile up and running – monthly gas, maintenance, and payment plans add up for car owners.

"You spend a heck of a lot on your car, your car isn't much use without a road," Novick said.

PBOT, Novick and Hales are hosting more town halls, starting next Wednesday, The town hall is from 6:30 -8:30 p.m. at Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, 10301 N.E. Glisan St.

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story misspelled John Horvick's name. The Oregonian regrets the error.

## **The Portland Tribune**

### **Portlanders split on street maintenance fee**

*By Jim Redden*

Anyone looking for an easy solution to Portland's street funding woes will be disappointed by a survey released Thursday at City Hall.

It shows that city residents are almost evenly split over whether to pay a small monthly fee for maintenance and safety improvements.

And they are even more opposed to most other revenue options, including a city sales tax, a city income tax and a property tax increase.

As a result, Transportation Commission Steve Novick says Portlanders and the rest of the City Council need to continue discussing what to do to fix and improve the city's streets for a least a couple more months. He hopes the council will do something to generate more money for the streets before too long, however, because they are continuing to deteriorate.

"The longer we wait, the more it's going to cost to repair the streets," Novick said at the press conference where he released the survey.

The survey was conducted by DHM Research as part of an ongoing effort by Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales to come up with a funding package to seriously reduce the city's backlog of poorly maintained streets and add such safety improvements as more sidewalks, crosswalks and crossing signals.

Previous surveys have show increasing street maintenance and improving safety is a top priority for most Portlanders. But the survey released on April 10 showed 47 percent of residents support an \$8 monthly street maintenance fee while 49 percent oppose it.

The figures for a \$12 fee are 44 percent in favor and 50 percent opposed. When additional programs like increased transit or bridge maintenance are added, support for a \$12 fee only increases to 46 percent while 48 percent oppose it.

According to the poll, there are number of things Portland could do to increase support for an \$8 or \$12 fee. They including requiring businesses to also pay it, putting it in a dedicated fund that cannot be spent on anything else, and eliminating the leaf removal fee if either one is approved.

Support only increases a few percentage points with those implementation options, however.

No other funding option received more than 34 percent in the survey, however.

Ironically, an \$8 or \$12 monthly fee would not raise nearly enough money to fully erase the maintenance backlog. They would only raise between \$34 and \$52 million a year (including business contributions), while the City Auditors Office says at least \$75 million a year is more like it.

Hales and Novick have scheduled the following series of public forums in coming weeks to continuing discussing what to do about about the streets:

- Wednesday, April 16, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, 10301 N.E. Glisan St.
- Thursday, April 17, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Kaiser Permanente's Town Hall, 3704 N. Interstate Ave.
- Thursday, April 24, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Multnomah Arts Center, 7688 S.W. Capitol Hwy.
- Thursday, May 1, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., Woodstock School, 5601 S.E. 50th Ave.

## **Willamette Week**

### **Survey Shows Cracks in Public Support for \$12-a-Month Street Fee** **UPDATE: Adding businesses to fee system could raise \$52 million a year.**

*By Aaron Mesh*

A phone survey ordered by City Commissioner Steve Novick shows weak support for an \$8-a-month or \$12-a-month "street maintenance and safety" fee, with as many as 50 percent of voters opposed. The survey found only 44 percent of voters supported a street fee of \$12 a month per Portland household. But that number rose to 51 percent once pollsters explained what the fee would fund: road maintenance and pedestrian safety construction projects.

The numbers were only a little better for the \$8-a-month option. It initially received support from 47 percent of voters, but support rose to 52 percent after the explanation.

A \$12-a-month fee (\$144 a year) on Portland's roughly 250,000 households could bring in \$36 million annually for street paving and building sidewalks, though PBOT officials say discounts mean it would only bring in \$25 to \$35 million.

Releasing the survey results at a City Hall press conference today, Novick tried to accentuate the positive.

"It's clear that Portlanders are more likely to support a street fee when they learn more about what it could pay for," Novick said in a statement.

"Street maintenance and safety continue to be top priorities for Portland residents," he continued, "and they will be at the top of the list of any funding package we put before council in the coming months. Congress isn't coming to the rescue any time soon, so we here in Portland have to take control of our own destiny."

But he may not ask voters to control the process: Both Novick and Mayor Charlie Hales have said they haven't decided whether to place a fee on the ballot, or simply pass it without a public vote.

UPDATE, 3:30 pm: PBOT spokesman Dylan Rivera tells WW the transportation bureau has adjusted its figures—and plans to seek an equal fee from businesses.

That means the fee could raise as much as \$52 million a year for PBOT.

Rivera writes:

Making certain assumptions about compliance rates and discounts (such as low-income discounts) we might include, the \$8 fee could raise \$17 million from households (and we would plan to raise an equivalent amount from businesses) and the \$12 fee could raise about \$25-\$26 million (and we would plan to raise an equivalent amount from businesses). So the total could be between \$34 and \$52 million.

## The Mercury

### Steve Novick Will Look to a Monthly Fee to Solve PBOT's Funding Woes

*By Dirk Vanderhart*

If there were still any doubts about how city leaders want to inject new money into Portland's underfunded transportation system, they were just obliterated.

Flanked by sundry charts, and with a projector flashing more behind him, transportation Commissioner Steve Novick told reporters this afternoon that the city's taken the pulse of the public... and the public sort of supports monthly "street maintenance and safety fees."

According to polling carried out from March 27 to April 1, Portlanders are roughly split on kicking in \$8 or \$12 per household. And polled participants grew more enthusiastic for the proposal when told what it might go to fund— things like street maintenance, safety improvements, bicycle infrastructure, and potentially non-City of Portland projects like transit and seismic retrofits for a county bridge—according to John Horvick, a staffer at DHM Research, which carried out the 800-person poll.

Still, it's hardly a groundswell of support. Even when keyed in to all the desirable ends more transportation funding could achieve, only a bare majority of 52 percent support an \$8 monthly fee per household. A \$12 fee garnered 51 percent support.

Novick said the split may be a sign Portlanders don't hear enough about transit funding (though both he and Mayor Charlie Hales have relentlessly pressed the issue since Novick took over the Portland Bureau of Transportation last summer).

"What that tells us is there hasn't been as much discussion in this community about having enough money for transportation as there has about not having enough money for schools," Novick said, apparently referencing a schools bond voters passed in 2012.

Novick says a street fee isn't his preference—he'd like to toy with income tax rates to find more money—but that he's convinced by the poll such a fee is the most-palatable option. He explained dozens of cities in Oregon had instituted similar policies.

But Horvick made clear that the poll was heavily focused on a street fee, only asking about other potential funding mechanisms—income and sales tax changes—briefly, and toward the end. (Results from a previous poll asking about a gas tax increase never saw the light of day, but were apparently highly

opposed. It wasn't mentioned this time around.) Asked whether that format may have skewed results in favor of a street fee, Novick deferred.

"They told us this would give us a valid result, and we took their word for it," he said. "It's partly a measure of cost. Ideally, I'd have liked to do 8 different surveys."

So is a "street fee" looking like the answer?

"I have to say yes," Novick admitted.

PBOT's funding woes have loomed for a long time, but fixes have been tough to come by. The bureau gets much of its funding from gas tax revenue and parking fees, but those haven't kept pace with the rising cost of materials. Plus, PBOT's committed to big regional projects like light rail and the Sellwood Bridge that sap its available cash.

And even the fees being discussed will only partly dig Portland out of its enormous street maintenance pothole. Still, Novick says, it would be a start.

~~According to PBOT calculations, an \$8 monthly fee could raise \$17 million to \$25 million a year. A \$12 fee could raise between \$25 million and \$35 million a year.~~ Update, 4 pm: PBOT has revised those estimates. It now says an \$8 fee could raise about \$34 million, and a \$12 fee could raise \$52 million. The Portland Auditor's Office has said PBOT needs to spend \$85 million a year to do right by our roads. That number is currently closer to \$10 million.

"It's not that much, but it's a heck of a lot better than what we're doing now," Novick said of the fee proposal.

But just how that proposal takes shape is, of course, still a matter of discussion. Novick conceded city council could implement a fee system on its own, though it could also put the matter to voters. And there's no indication yet how the city would move to collect the fee—survey participants were opposed, unsurprisingly, to the money being tacked onto their water and sewer bills.

Whatever proposal Novick and Hales come up with, we'll be hearing about it within the next several months.

"We feel a real sense of urgency," Novick said. "The longer we wait, the worse things get."

## **Steve Novick Explains Why Cutting Police Command Staff Won't Bring Down the Sky**

*By Denis C. Theriault*

Commissioner Steve Novick has been the loudest voice in city hall—really the only one—publicly questioning how much the city of Portland spends on its police bureau. This winter, he sent out a memo marking three potential targets for clawbacks: the bureau's mounted patrol, its Drugs and Vice Division, and its top-heavy command staff.

He's gotten attention, at varying degrees, for all three. The nonprofit Friends of the Mounted Patrol launched a PR blitz after Novick made inroads with his colleagues on the notion of ditching police horses. He brought Chief Mike Reese and Captain Mark Kruger to a city hall budget hearing and made them defend the drugs unit. And he and Commissioner Nick Fish sparred behind the scenes with the police bureau while preparing a citywide "span of control" report that quantified the millions the city might save if the cops got by with fewer captains and lieutenants.

That last effort left off with the cops promising to give Novick some additional details and rationales about their staffing, details other bureaus turned in before the report was finished, by April 1. They complied. Sort of. A large binder with position descriptions and organizational charts was dropped off in Novick's office earlier this month—although it was devoid of any explanations for why some of those supervisory positions had only three or fewer subordinates.

Novick, meanwhile, has done some digging on his own. He tracked down a bureau organizational chart from 1993, compared it to the bureau of today—and made some interesting findings. He shared them with me in an email.

Some historical data. In 1993, there were 8 captains, 953 sworn officers, and 1,189 total staff – and 52,801 Part 1 crimes. In 2013, there were 13 captains, 932 sworn officers, 1,199 total staff, and 32,054 Part 1 crimes. So we have had a 39.3% decline in major crimes, a 2.2% decline in sworn staff ... and a 62.5% increase in the number of captains.

Three of the new captains result from adding a captain between the commander and the lieutenants in the precincts. In 1993, we had three precincts, and simply had a commander and lieutenants in the precincts. In the interim, we went through a period where we had five precincts. When we re-consolidated into three, a captain position was added in each precinct.

So let's recap: Crime is majorly down even though we've cut back on cops—with more of the cops we still have taking supervisory roles that move them off the streets and into the bureaucracy. Novick sees an interesting question emerging from that correlation—especially with so many other quality of life issues competing with the cops for scarce budget money.

Although our focus has been on the span of control issue, I do think it's reasonable to ask the question: If we had known in 1993 that major crimes were going to decline by 39.3% over the next 20 years, would we have planned to reduce the number of sworn staff by only 2.2%, while accumulating a massive backlog of unmet needs in Parks and Housing... not to mention disaster preparedness?