

The Oregonian

Could plastic roads, rather than an annual street fee, solve Portland's maintenance problem?

*By Douglas Perry
July 21, 2015*

Nobody's happy about the possibility of a hefty annual street fee in Portland. At the same time, no one denies that our streets are in need of repair.

Could the answer be to not repair our asphalt streets at all? Instead, we potentially could replace them -- with plastic ones. Once that's done, Portlanders might never need to pay another street fee again.

We're referring to an in-development product called, simply enough, PlasticRoad. Technology blog Engadget calls it "both more sustainable and more practical than old-fashioned blacktop."

This is an "idea on paper at the moment," admits VolkerWessels, the Dutch construction company behind the innovation. But the company is serious about it. Their plan is to take 100-percent recycled plastic and turn it into prefabricated roads that can be easily installed. The company insists the plastic roads would be stronger and quieter than traditional roads, and they would endure much greater temperature ranges without damage.

"Roads can be built in weeks instead of months," the company adds. "It is also much easier to control the quality of the road (stiffness, water drainage, etc.)." VolkerWessels insists a PlasticRoad would be "virtually maintenance free."

The Guardian reports that the city of Rotterdam in the Netherlands has raised its hand to be the first place to try out the new road material. "We have a 'street lab' available where innovations like this can be tested," said Jaap Peters of Rotterdam's engineering bureau.

First, however, more R&D is necessary. VolkerWessels roads director Rolf Mars says the company hopes to have a pilot project down on the ground, in Rotterdam or elsewhere, within three years.

Can Portland wait that long? City leaders have been putting off the road-maintenance problem for decades. The Oregonian's Brad Schmidt pointed out last month that the City Council first highlighted the issue in 1988 and hasn't done much about it since. PlasticRoad might not be an especially realistic local solution in the near term: so far it's an untested product, after all. But it sure would be an unexpected bonus if Portland's procrastination on the roads issue ended up being for the best.

The Portland Tribune

Hales wants city to buy five ODOT lots

*By Jim Redden
July 21, 2015*

Southeast Portland business and neighborhood leaders — nervous about city talk of moving the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp into inner Southeast Portland — were startled last week to learn Mayor Charlie Hales has decided the city should buy all surplus Oregon Department of Transportation property in the area.

Hales made the statement at a Wednesday City Council hearing about buying a surplus ODOT parcel at Southeast Third Avenue and Harrison Street. Hales and Commissioner Amanda Fritz have repeatedly said it is being considered as the new location for the Right 2 Dream Too homeless camp, now in Old Town.

Hales did not say what other ODOT properties he wants the city to buy, and no list of surplus ODOT properties was available at the hearing.

But Hales mentioned one of the sites is currently being used to store dirt and gravel. That describes one of three blocks ODOT owns on the west side of Southeast Water Avenue between Madison and Taylor streets. The two other blocks are currently vacant. All three were acquired by ODOT when I-5 was built in the 1960s.

Hales' spokesman Dana Haynes said there are five potential close-in ODOT sites, including the Third and Harrison site. Haynes said city property managers are readying a report on them for the council to consider this summer.

"The mayor wants to buy all five, for now to land-bank," Haynes said.

ODOT spokesman Don Hamilton said that although the three blocks along Water Avenue are not currently on the market, the agency would be willing to entertain any offers from the city.

"If it's true there is a plan to buy up all of these ODOT properties, we would like to see an open process for deciding what to do with them," Don Gardner, vice president of the Southeast Uplift coalition office, testified after Hales made his disclosure. SEUL represents 20 neighborhoods in Southeast Portland.

Gardner's comments echoed those of Debbie Kitchin, president of the Central Eastside Industrial Council, which represents businesses in the area.

The issue comes up as the City Council appears close to approving a 20-year development plan for inner Southeast Portland, known as the Southeast Quadrant Plan, as soon as July 29. That plan makes no mention of the ODOT properties, although those along Southeast Water Avenue seem prime for development.

During Wednesday's hearing, Hales insisted no decision has yet been made about moving the homeless camp. Instead, he said the purchase was merely part of a plan to buy all surplus ODOT property, something that had never been discussed publicly before.

Gardner and Kitchin testified that the council should not buy the Southeast Third and Harrison property without having a plan for it.

"It's very premature," Kitchin said.

Despite the opposition, the council approved the purchase of the property for \$254,044, pending the results of an environmental study that is underway. Haynes said that indicates council support for buying all the properties.

"The council didn't express much concern about the concept of land-banking on the Central Eastside, because we're expecting the area to grow. Especially in light of the city's new comprehensive plan, to be adopted later this year," Haynes said.

Although Hales said no decision has yet been made about moving the homeless camp — commonly called R2DToo — to the site, that is obviously the plan. Commissioner Dan Saltzman got Hales to say the money could come from \$900,000 that Old Town developers have given the city to relocate the camp. Several R2DToo representatives testified in support of the purchase, and Fritz said she expected to meet with them and Southeast Portland business and neighborhood leaders before asking the council to approve the relocation later this year.

Both Hales and Fritz promised the council will hold a separate hearing on the relocation before the council votes on it.

Taxi drivers give earful to City Council about impact of deregulation

*By Steve Law
July 17, 2015*

Out with the old taxi workers, in with the new.

That's the apparent impact of Portland's move to deregulate its taxi industry, at least according to much of the testimony delivered to the Portland City Council on Wednesday afternoon in a three-and-a-half-hour hearing.

A string of veteran taxi drivers said their income had been slashed 30 to 50 percent since late-April, when the city allowed Uber and Lyft and their low-cost, do-it-yourself taxi network into the once heavily regulated Portland taxi market for a four-month pilot project. An equal number of Uber and Lyft drivers who are new to the field testified that they've found lucrative and enjoyable new work when they had little, and are quite happy with the money they're making since turning their personal cars into taxis hailed via smartphones.

City Commissioner Steve Novick, who oversees transportation and is leading the charge to deregulate the taxi industry here, said the city's experiment seems to be paying off, at least for some.

"It seems to be working pretty well for consumers," Novick said at the onset of Wednesday's hearing. "I want to have more information about the impact on and welfare of drivers."

Then he got an earful on that subject — glowing reports from Uber and Lyft drivers and angry complaints from traditional taxi drivers.

Jeanette, a Radio Cab taxi driver who declined to give her last name, said she's considering applying for food stamps because of reduced income. To cut her living expenses, she's now living with three other adults in a one-bedroom home.

Heather Dunn, in contrast, said she was able to get off of food stamps after landing a driving job with Uber.

Raye Miles, president of Broadway Cab, said her company's ridership in June was down 30 percent from the prior year.

Brooke Steger, Uber's Northwest general manager, said her drivers in Portland are taking home close to \$20 an hour on average.

One of those drivers, David Holmquist, said he made \$885 last week and is averaging \$23 an hour the first two months of his new job.

Jan Weston, who's driving for both Uber and Lyft, said he's making around \$35 an hour.

But some taxi drivers said they are seeing some Uber and Lyft drivers violate the rules and try to pick off passengers at hotel stands, which are reserved for regular taxi companies under the pilot project.

Wynde Dyer, a Green Cab driver, urged the City Council to reinstate some sort of cap on the number of taxi drivers after the four-month pilot is done.

"I understand taxi drivers have taken a hit," Novick said at the close of the hearing. "I think a lesson that I get from this session is how hard things are for working people in this economy."

Even Weston, who's doing quite well driving for Uber and Lyft, expressed sympathy for longtime taxi drivers after hearing how they've been affected.

"My biggest concern is there's something going on here that is not working well for the cab drivers," Weston said. He called for the city to establish a "level playing field."

That could be a huge challenge for the city. Uber and Lyft drivers have relatively little cost to enter the market, and their use of smart phones appears far cheaper than traditional taxi dispatch systems. Regular taxi companies also are burdened by past city caps on the number of vehicles they could provide and limits on what they can charge customers. The cab companies also have plenty of fixed costs not borne by Uber and Lyft, including city requirements to paint and detail their cars, install a video camera in every vehicle, and fit 20 percent of their fleets with wheelchair lifts.

The pilot program will last another two months. Then the City Council will take up the issue in August of how to regulate — or not — the taxi industry into the future.

Vision Zero plan will take 15 months

*By Jennifer Anderson
July 21, 2015*

Portland's Vision Zero plan could take longer than imagined to come to fruition.

According to the latest information obtained by the Tribune in the past week, the Portland Bureau of Transportation's Vision Zero Implementation Plan will have a draft plan of the Vision Zero Action Plan ready for adoption by October 2016, which is 15 months from now.

The Vision Zero executive committee and task force that will do the work have yet to be named.

Once formed, the groups will have to wade through all of PBOT's and the city's existing plans and safety goals relating to multi-modal traffic.

The city has four different overarching plans that speak to traffic safety, all with different goals.

PBOT's two-year action plan — Portland Progress (written this year) — calls for the city to move toward zero traffic-related fatalities and serious injuries in the next 10 years.

In the city's Regional Transportation Plan (written last year), the safety performance target is: "By 2040, reduce the number of fatal and severe injury crashes for pedestrians, bicyclists and motor vehicle occupants each by 50 percent."

In the city's Draft Comp Plan (written in 2014), the safety goal is to "move Portland toward zero traffic-related fatalities and no serious injuries," without an end date given.

And the city's Transportation System Plan (last updated in 2007 and currently in the process of another update) has no mention of any Vision Zero-type goal but gives preference to transportation improvements that "use existing roadway capacity efficiently and improve the safety of the system."

The Transportation System Plan overlaps with the Portland Comprehensive Plan, which is informed by the Portland Plan and Climate Action Plan.

PBOT has just a few more, which neighbors and activists might be most familiar with: the Bicycle Plan 2030, Pedestrian Master Plan, Freight Master Plan, and various neighborhood/area plans, among others.

Portland has 6.2 roadway fatalities per 100,000 people, much lower than the U.S. average of 11.6.

Yet it's more than Seattle (5.2), San Francisco (4), New York (the lowest in the U.S. at 3.9), and Stockholm (1.1).

Sweden adopted Vision Zero in 1997 and aims for zero roadway deaths by 2020.

In Portland-motorist deaths dropped between 2009-2013 and the previous five years, while motorcycle-rider and pedestrian deaths increased. Bicyclist deaths remained about the same.

PBOT's implementation plan includes a handful of marks of progress so far: applying consistent messaging via their plan and website; seeking authority from the Oregon Department of Transportation to set speeds on local roads, which is underway; gaining legislative authority to use fixed photo radar cameras, which just occurred; and expanding the city's red-light camera program.

PBOT also plans to seek funds through the city, state, grants and other resources.

Finally, the implementation plan includes a draft list of safety indicators that will be tracked to determine success.

In addition to fatality and serious injury numbers, performance indicators include: speed compliance, use of safety belts, alcohol and drug use, bike helmet use, red-light running and vehicle safety.

Safety measures include the number of speed cameras, red-light cameras, improved pedestrian crossings, drunk driving citations, speed bumps built, miles of protected walk and bike lanes, and others.

[View the PBOT Vision Zero Implementation Plan here.](#)

Willamette Week

Portland Officials Make Strategic Move to End Lawsuit Over "Portland Oregon" Sign

By Beth Slovic
July 21, 2015

City of Portland officials are employing a creative legal maneuver to get rid of a lawsuit concerning its trademark of the "Portland Oregon" sign.

And the move is likely to work, says the attorney for the Portland business owner who brought the suit in June.

The upshot? The larger question that the suit posed will remain unanswered, at least for now: Does the city of Portland have a right to make even small-time artists pay license fees for commercial use of the "Portland Oregon" sign?

Jeff Kunkle, owner of Vintage Roadside, a Portland company that sells gifts and memorabilia, argued in his June court filing that the city's trademark for the "Portland Oregon" sign is invalid because it rests on a misinterpretation of trademark law. The sign, his attorney argued, does not promote goods or services, therefore it can't be trademarked.

Kunkle brought the suit after a deputy city attorney contacted him on Etsy in May, telling him that he needed to purchase a city license to sell images of the old "Made in Oregon" sign.

The deputy city attorney, Kalei Taylor, told Kunkle that the city owned the rights to the "Portland Oregon" sign and the previous iteration of the sign, the one that promoted the "Made in Oregon" store.

Last week, the city told Kunkle's attorney, Robert Swider, that it was filing a covenant not to sue, which basically means that the city still believes the city owns the rights to the sign but won't try to enforce them against Kunkle—now or ever.

Why the sudden act of generosity? There appear to be two reasons.

By eliminating that point of contention, the city takes away Kunkle's standing to bring the lawsuit.

"The city, in its infinite wisdom, has found the out," says Swider. "In all likelihood we will end up dismissing the lawsuit."

Jen Clodius, a spokeswoman for the city's Office of Management and Finance, which oversees the sign, also says the city got new advice from its outside attorneys on trademark issues. The attorneys advised the city that artistic renderings of the sign may not violate the trademark, she says.

The city's move doesn't protect it from a separate lawsuit by a new plaintiff, Swider says.

"It's one way to avoid one plaintiff and to defer a decision on the bigger issue," he says.