

**The Oregonian**

## **Portland voters should oppose 10-cent gas tax: Editorial Endorsement**

*By The Oregonian Editorial Board*

*April 21, 2016*

A couple of years ago, Portland Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick struggled mightily, and clumsily, to raise money for road maintenance. The increasingly desperate process dragged on for months until January 2015, when the mayor suspended the effort in order to give legislators a "clean shot" to negotiate a statewide transportation funding package. After the funding effort in Salem fizzled, City Council proposed a local gas tax of 10 cents per gallon.

Portlanders will vote on that tax in May, and they should say "no." As they do so, however, they should give Novick and his colleagues credit for learning from their earlier missteps and proposing a simple and temporary funding mechanism. Voters also should hold out hope that City Council will come back, if necessary, with a better-focused proposal after the 2017 legislative session, when lawmakers again will consider a statewide transportation package.

No one seriously questions the need for Portland to spend more on roads. The city's maintenance backlog surpassed \$1 billion last year, according to a report by the Portland Bureau of Transportation, which Novick oversees. To meet pavement-condition benchmarks, the report estimated, Portland would have to spend about \$119 million per year for a decade. The city doesn't spend anywhere near that much, which is one reason the backlog keeps growing. It was \$916 million a year earlier.

Failing to maintain pavement, meanwhile, has widely understood consequences, which range from an unpleasant ride to added public expense. It's axiomatic that roads are far less expensive to maintain than they are to rehabilitate for lack of maintenance.

Why, then, oppose a 10-cent hike in the local gas tax (Multnomah County already taxes fuel at 3 cents per gallon)? Because much of the revenue wouldn't be used to fix the core problem: maintenance-starved pavement. The tax would raise about \$16 million per year for four years, at which point voters would have to renew it. Of that annual \$16 million, City Council has proposed to use only \$9 million — or 56 percent — on street repairs. The other 44 percent would be used for a variety of other transportation projects, including traffic calming, sidewalk construction, crosswalk improvements and bicycle routes.

City Council deserves credit for proposing a straightforward gas tax rather than a household fee or a complex and progressive mechanism of the sort Novick considered shortly before last year's brainstorming hiatus. The city also deserves credit for putting the matter before voters and for ensuring accountability by requiring a renewal vote after a few years. But when you're proposing to raise \$16 million as a way to address a \$119 million annual street maintenance crisis, doesn't it make sense to spend all, or nearly all, of the revenue on pavement?

That isn't to say that sidewalk construction, crosswalk improvements and the like are unimportant. That couldn't be further from the truth, and commissioners should seek to pay for such projects to the extent that they can without using money generated by a citywide gas tax. The city, recall, maneuvered itself into today's crisis by failing to prioritize maintenance in years past even as transportation revenues rose, the city auditor's office explained in 2013.

Portland could have maintained its roads better, but chose instead to spend money on other things — "streetcar operations, downtown marketing, and transit mall upkeep." It's time, finally, to treat the city's crumbling pavement as a priority, and the proposed gas tax does not do that. To raise 56 cents for road repairs, motorists are expected to spend 44 cents on other things. No, thanks.

Saying "no" to this proposal may have a pair of beneficial effects, beginning in next year's legislative session. Lawmakers are expected to consider, once again, a funding package that would involve a hike in the state gas tax. Oregon needs such a funding package, and to that end boosting the state gas tax will be a lot easier if residents of Oregon's biggest city aren't paying 10 cents per gallon more at the pump than they are now. Let's hope, meanwhile, that Portland city councilors will take failure in May as an argument not to repeat the spread-the-revenue approach should they ask voters to approve a local gas tax once again.

## **The Portland Business Journal**

### **City, feds dish out \$47M for Portland affordable projects**

*By Andy Giegerich*

*April 20, 2016*

Portland's Housing Bureau has awarded some \$47 million in local and federal funds to eight affordable housing project proposals.

It's the largest such funding award in the bureau's history. The agency expects the projects to deliver 585 new units of affordable housing.

Some 120 of the units would go to those earning up to 30 percent of the median family income, which is \$15,400 for individuals and \$24,300 for families of four.

The awards include:

- \$5 million for 72Foster, a REACH effort that includes 108 new affordable units on Southeast Foster Road.
- \$4.5 million for the N. Williams Center project, in the Interstate Corridor Urban Renewal Area.
- \$9 million for 76 units along Northeast Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

- \$5.6 million for Block 45, in the Oregon Convention Center Urban Renewal Area. The project includes "units and supportive services for vulnerable populations such as chronically homeless persons and survivors of domestic violence," according to the city.
- \$12.9 million for seismic and capital renovations at The Henry, a Central City Concern project.

## **Fiber fellows: Google adds training program, but not service, to Portland**

*By Andy Giegerich*

*April 20, 2016*

Google hasn't technically committed to bringing its high-speed Fiber network to Portland.

In a move that could be read to suggest an imminent announcement, the company is working with a "digital literacy" program locally that's appeared in cities that actually have procured Google Fiber. The company is working with the Nonprofit Technology Network, which is accepting Digital Inclusion Fellowship applications for 22 spots.

The program, created by the Nonprofit Technology Network last year, is being offered in Portland and 10 cities. It will train 22 people to create and lead digital literacy programs.

The idea is to help "job-seekers learn digital workplace skills and teach parents how to access their children's grades online," among other skills.

Google Fiber will contribute approximately \$1 million for the program to cover salaries and benefits for fellows. The applications are being taken through May 13.

Google announced that it's considering Portland and surrounding cities for fiber service in February 2014.