

Willamette Week

Could “Smart Boots” Be the Future for Portland Motorists Who Skip Paying Tickets?

*By Beth Slovic
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Portland's most recent lobbying reports show a new company in town pitching its technology to help address Portland's shortfall of transportation funding.

This time, it's New Jersey-based PayLock, a company that purports to "humanize the parking business" with its high-tech car boots that more easily ensnare motorists who don't pay their parking tickets. With PayLock's "smartbooting," motorists can use credit cards over the phone to release boots on the spot, saving them the hassle of tracking down cars that might otherwise have been towed.

Last June, Portland City Commissioner Steve Novick told *The Oregonian* he would work to recover the then-backlog of \$32.4 million in unpaid parking tickets, possibly with smart boots that are in use in New York, Oakland and Seattle.

A year later, Novick says he finds the technology intriguing but adds the city isn't ready. Mostly that's because Multnomah County Circuit Court, which collects fines from Portland parking tickets, isn't equipped to handle the change.

"I'd like to go from towing to booting partly because towing fees are so expensive and really hard on lower-income people," he writes in an email. "And being able to call and make a payment and take off the boot yourself is a lot more convenient for everyone than going somewhere to pay and then having someone from the city have to come to take the boot off. (I confess I was booted more than once in Salem years ago, and it was a rather laborious process.)

"The courts have told us, though, that it will take a lot of time before their computer systems will be able to work with such a system," he adds. "The advantage of delay could be that more competitors come into that market and the cost could go down."

In New York City, news reports from 2012 suggest motorists may face fewer hassles with smart boots, but they don't necessarily escape high fees.