

The Oregonian

Portland Will Send 10-Cent Gas Tax Back to Voters in May 2020

*By Andrew Theen
March 21, 2019*

Portland Commissioner Chloe Eudaly said Wednesday that she plans to send a 10-cent gas tax back to voters in May 2020.

The transportation commissioner made the announcement Wednesday during the City Council's first annual briefing on the 2016 voter-approved gas tax.

Portland plans to put the funding measure on the May ballot, ahead of the log-jammed November docket which is expected to include a Metro-led regional transportation package that could number in the billions of dollars.

"We are certainly going to take the gas tax back to the voters," Eudaly said. "It's a dime for a dollar's worth of problems."

The announcement comes as the city is just hitting the halfway mark on its four-year gas tax, but transportation officials say the funding scheme has already and consistently overperformed the city's initial revenue projections and Portlanders will see the results on the ground soon.

"This construction season is going to be a doozy," Eudaly said.

Voters approved the existing four-year gas tax with 52 percent of the vote in May 2016. The 10-cent gas tax was projected to bring in \$64 million through a marketing push designated "Fixing our Streets." Portland City Council opted to refer the gas tax to voters after then-Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick sparked a years-long debate about the need for more money for street safety and maintenance projects.

With two full calendar years of gas tax revenue in hand, transportation officials said this week residents will see a dramatic increase in construction this year and in 2020. Portland has collected \$39 million in gas tax money so far, \$7 million more than initially estimated. According to transportation officials, it's spent nearly \$11 million of that revenue, but spending will pick up this year.

Transportation officials say they are trying to "leverage" the gas tax revenue with another \$63.7 million in spending from other sources. The largest chunk of the additional funding, \$21 million, comes from transportation fees charged to developers for new construction.

Some of those projects include urban renewal funds or federal grants. Hannah Schafer, a transportation spokeswoman, said the city has tried to take a step back and look at ways to improve the specific projects outlined in the 2016 ballot measure. Sometimes that means adding sidewalks or protected or buffered bike lanes in addition to paving, for example. Throughout the city, crews are conducting basic repairs on pavement in hopes of preventing further degradation.

"These focused interventions keep the rest of the street from failing," PBOT staffer Mychal Tetteh told the council Wednesday.

Twenty-one projects of various size and scope will break ground in 2019 – ranging from sidewalks and paving and bike lanes on Southwest Capitol Highway to paving North Denver

Avenue to protected bike lanes and paving work on Halsey and Weidler in the Gateway neighborhood.

A citizen oversight committee is advising the city on how to best spend the money.

The majority of the gas tax revenue, 56 percent, goes to street maintenance projects while the remainder is spent on pedestrian or bicycle safety.

A separate heavy vehicle tax approved by the City Council in 2016 is projected to bring in \$8 million during the four-year period. City officials previously said the tax would bring in \$10 million, but those estimates were revised downward last year after the politicians opted not to raise the tax rate because initial projects of the number of eligible trucking businesses expected to pay the tax were dramatically under initial projections.

The city has an interactive map with all the projects expected to break ground in 2019 and 2020 at fixingourstreets.com/annualreport [click the “what’s next” tab]

Portland Detective Under Investigation for Allegedly Using Take-Home City Car Extensively While Off-Duty

By Maxine Bernstein

March 21, 2019

Portland police are investigating allegations that a detective used his take-home car extensively while off-duty, putting thousands of extra miles on the vehicle.

Robert Norvell Hollins III’s alleged extracurricular use of the city-owned, unmarked car was discovered after it had racked up all the extra mileage and needed repairs, according to multiple sources familiar with the inquiry who aren’t designated to speak publicly about it.

Police Lt. Tina Jones, bureau spokeswoman, declined comment, saying she couldn’t discuss a personnel matter.

Hollins, 56, has been reassigned to the bureau’s Telephone Reporting Unit while an internal affairs investigation continues.

Hollins retired on Sept. 29, 2017, but was rehired the next day and has continued to work as a detective under the bureau’s retire/rehire program. The rehiring runs for up to two years, so Hollins’ work is set to end in September.

Hollins didn’t respond to messages for comment. Officer Daryl Turner, president of the Portland Police Association, also declined comment on the allegations.

The Police Bureau prohibits the personal use of city-owned cars. Officers granted take-home cars may use them to drive to and from work and for other police-related activities, but not for recreation or vacation trips.

The Telephone Reporting Unit, also known as operations support, is the place where officers are usually assigned after being removed from the street while under internal investigation. They take crime complaints by phone or check reports submitted online.

Willamette Week

Portland's Urban Hot Tub Spa Can Keep Operating, City Council Says

*By Allison Place
March 21, 2019*

Everett House Community Healing Center was jeopardized when its parking lot was replaced by apartments. Elected officials grant a reprieve—but say no more acupuncture.

Portland City Council has bailed the Everett House Community Healing Center out of hot water—to a degree.

The urban hot tubs on a residential block of Northeast Portland were imperiled in January when a city hearings officer said the healing center needed to provide on-site parking and scale back its programming in order to stay open.

On March 20, the City Council partially reversed the hearings officer's decision. It ruled that the the alternative-medicine center can operate without providing a parking lot, but it can't keep offering acupuncture or chiropractic services.

"It seems the Everett House has been operating under an 'ask forgiveness, not permission' basis for a long time," said Commissioner Chloe Eudaly. "I understand why chiropractic and acupuncture would be reasonable to have at this facility, but those are medical services and need to be treated differently."

The central issue in the case was whether the city's on-street parking requirements are being met by the Everett House—after its longtime parking lot was turned into an apartment building with no parking. But really, it was about a decadeslong feud between the Everett House and neighbors who felt like the business was overtaking the neighborhood.

Supporters of the Everett House argued that the business offers valuable health services for the community.

"The Everett House is a quiet place to rest and bring life back into balance. This cannot be reproduced in a commercial setting," said Elliott Mantell, the spa's operator. "It is abundantly clear that many people have come to depend on the Everett House as their sanctuary."

Other supporters added that the Everett House is environmentally friendly.

"We don't even need to have our own hot tub at home," said Bob Czimbala, a motivational speaker and longtime member of the healing center. "Which I think is very ecological."

Opponents of the Everett House said it's a for-profit medical office building operating under the guise of a nonprofit.

"One of my neighbors called in a noise complaint every day last summer," Fred King, the respondent in the case, said. "I don't understand how this could possibly be a nonprofit community center."

(Mantell's lawyer disputed King's claim. She said that Mantell filed a FOIA and found only one noise complaint against the facility.)

Another neighbor who opposed the appeal, Leviticus Cole, said that's is frightening to have so much traffic on a street when he has two young kids.

"The parking issue is not a parking issue, it's a traffic issue," Cole said. "And the ebb and flow of people who come from the building creates a safety concern."

The atmosphere in the council chambers was placid. But when neighbors who were fed up by the Everett House testified to the council about their qualms with the business operating in the middle of their neighborhood, they received a thundering chorus of thumbs down, behind their backs, while those testifying in favor of the Everett House were greeted with a round of thumbs up when they walked back to their seats after testifying.

Mayor Ted Wheeler joined Commissioners Nick Fish and Eudaly in voting for the hot tubs. Commissioner Amanda Fritz was the sole dissenter.

"I think there's a hugely different impact on the neighborhood than was envisioned in 1982," Fritz said. "I think it's a mistake to allow it to continue and expand. No."

A final vote is scheduled for May 1, giving the City Council and its attorneys time to review the Everett House's responses.

The Skanner

PBOT Unveils Northeast Greenway Plan

By Christen McCurdy

March 21, 2019

The Portland Bureau of Transportation has released its plan for a new bike way in Northeast Portland – a project that generated controversy last summer and fall about the agency's outreach efforts, as well the possibility of altering Northeast 7th Avenue to create a neighborhood greenway.

The resulting plan is what PBOT spokesperson Hannah Schafer describes as a "twofer" – a hybrid route using both Northeast 7th Avenue and Northeast 9th Avenue to connect the Woodlawn Neighborhood to the Lloyd District.

Northeast 9th Avenue will become a neighborhood greenway – defined by PBOT planner Nick Falbo as a "safe, calm street for walking and biking" with shared lane markings (sometimes called "sharrows") on the street, extra marking at intersections to aid bike and pedestrian intersections and traffic diverters at high-traffic intersections.

And Northeast 7th – previously considered for development as a greenway – will undergo a series of improvements to make the route safer: safer crossings at intersections near schools and areas with high levels of pedestrian activity and enhanced crossing markers at some intersections. The agency will also add speed bumps to slow traffic at certain locations, including Albina Head Start and King Elementary School.

Falbo said PBOT plans to remove some of the roundabouts on 7th in the Irvington neighborhood – which were intended to slow traffic but create pinch points instead -- and will add bike lanes on some sections of the street, including a lane connecting Tillamook to Weidler. Also under consideration: bike lane markers on sections of the street where cyclists are climbing a hill and therefore moving more slowly, so they can safely move out of the way of cars as they ride.

Eventually, the route will extend to southeast Portland via the Sullivan's Crossing Bridge, a bridge that will cross Sullivan's Gulch and be open to bicycles, pedestrians and emergency vehicles.

The new plan, PBOT officials said, is largely the result of community feedback, particularly from the Black community. Falbo said the initial results of outreach efforts – including a February 2018 open house at King Elementary School and an online open house early last year – showed support for a Northeast 7th Avenue greenway.

“The outreach process and the work that Nick and the planning team has done on this has really led to a great sort of resolution and, essentially, a bigger win than we would have ever gotten from choosing one street over the other. And it’s really the result of all the wonderful feedback that we’ve gotten from the Black community, from neighborhood associations – from everyone. Without having that participation, I don’t think this project would have been as well thought out without that feedback,” Schafer said.

Falbo noted that Northeast 7th sees an unusually high level of bike traffic, probably due to its proximity to Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd., and that’s why PBOT is still pursuing changes on the street that would better accommodate cycling. But, he said, Northeast 9th Avenue better meets the criteria for a neighborhood greenway: it’s parallel to a major thoroughfare, provides access to a lot of amenities and sees a relatively low volume of traffic (1000 or fewer cars per day).

But as The Skanner reported last August, outreach efforts were slow in reaching households of color, and some members of the Black community were critical of making Northeast 7th a neighborhood greenway due to the high volume of car traffic on the street. The agency subsequently convened focus groups with institutions like SEI – which draws Black families from around the metropolitan area to Northeast Portland for services – as well as the SOUL District Business Alliance, the Portland Community Reinvestment Initiative and individual stakeholders.

“I think PBOT has addressed community concerns,” said Ron Herndon, director of Albina Head Start, which is headquartered at Northeast 7th and Fremont, who previously expressed concern that a bike lane would make it difficult for families dropping children off at the facility. “They listened to those concerns with a degree of seriousness that is uncommonly rare with city, county and state governmental institutions.”

The transportation advocacy group The Street Trust, in a statement submitted to The Skanner, also expressed support for the Northeast 9th Avenue greenway, and praised PBOT for reaching out to communities of color.

“Martin Luther King Elementary School, Albina Head Start, and Northeast Community Fellowship Church are all located on NE 7th Avenue and persist in serving people of color even as massive economic displacement has changed the demographics of the surrounding neighborhood,” wrote Jillian Detweiler, executive director of The Street Trust. “Understood through this lens, a street design intended to limit automobile access would symbolize the City’s intention to further exclude people of color from neighborhoods that less than 20 years ago had concentrations of African American households.”

Detweiler added that a 9th Avenue greenway “can deliver the low-car experience needed to make a variety of cyclists feel comfortable without disrupting access to institutions serving people of color.”

“PBOT was proactive in getting the feedback of our community. They listened to the good, the bad and the ugly -- but most importantly they just listened,” said Anthony Deloney, director of strategic initiatives for SEI. “We appreciate that our feedback was heard and are hopeful it will be used throughout the implementation.”

Falbo said PBOT is planning on having an open house in the future to unveil final plans and make the public aware of the coming changes.

“It will feel like a different street,” Falbo said of Northeast 7th. “It will feel less like an arterial street and more like a neighborhood street. We want people to drive a little bit differently. We want people to bike differently.”

To stay updated on the Lloyd to Woodlawn project, visit PBOT's page to subscribe to email updates.

OPB

Scientists Getting New Tools To Monitor The Northwest's Volcanoes

By Erin Ross

March 21, 2019

If Glacier Peak were to wake up tomorrow and start rumbling, it would be hard for scientists to tell. The National Volcanic Early Warning and Monitoring Systems Act, passed in February, sets out to change that.

Glacier Peak, a volcano in Washington's North Cascades, is only monitored by one seismometer, which is a device designed to detect shaking. That makes it difficult to tell if shaking is from something volcanic — like an earthquake or a small explosion — or caused by something more ordinary, like a small rockfall, or a glacial “icequake.”

Eighteen volcanoes are classified as “very high threat” in the United States; eight of them are located in the Pacific Northwest. And right now only Mount St. Helens is considered well-monitored. The other seven are Mount Rainier, Mount Baker and Glacier Peak in Washington, and Mount Hood, the Three Sisters, Newberry Volcano and Crater Lake in Oregon.

The volcanoes get their high threat ranking because of their likelihood of eruption and close proximity to groups of humans.

None of them currently have the type of surveillance that scientists say they would need to accurately predict volcanic eruptions and model potential hazards.

At a press conference Thursday in Vancouver, Washington, Sen. Maria Cantwell, who spearheaded the legislation with Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, gathered with geologists and local public safety officials to discuss the impacts of the new legislation.

Dan Douthit, a spokesperson for the Portland Bureau of Emergency Communications, said eruptions from Mount St. Helens, Mount Hood, Mount Adams or Mount Jefferson (the latter two are considered high threat volcanoes) “could cause ashfall in the urban area, and also send mud and debris down the Columbia River, disrupt travel and the economy, and require the close coordination of government agencies throughout the region.”

An early warning system would give governments time to coordinate emergency response, he said, and mitigate the impacts of the travel disruptions.

“This legislation gives visitors, land managers and organizations like ours peace of mind while spending time in this majestic and impactful landscape, and ultimately, it will save lives in the event of an eruption,” said Ray Yurkewycz, executive director of the Mount St. Helens Institute.

Washington's Mount Rainier has about half the monitors of Mount St Helens. It's of particular concern to Cantwell. "It is estimated that 150,000 people who live near that area could see the impacts of a lahar off of Mount Rainier, and they might only have as much as 40 minutes to respond to that type of incident."

Accurately predicting eruptions is incredibly important. Even remote volcanic eruptions can cause lahars, which are massive flows of mud, debris and rock caused by melting glaciers and snow during eruptions. Those lahars can travel far downstream and destroy local communities. If a lahar started on Mount Rainier, for example, the town of Orting, Washington, would only have an hour to evacuate to high ground.

After the press conference, Seth Moran, a geologist with the Cascades Volcano Observatory, took Cantwell and reporters on a tour of the U.S. Geological Survey facility.

To demonstrate how more sensors are better than one, Moran gestured to a screen showing data coming in live from seven stations on Mount St. Helens. "This is what we're kind of aiming at, Mount St. Helens has a pretty good network," Moran said.

If something only shows up on one seismometer, it could be an anomaly — even the wind can give a false positive. "The important thing is when there's an earthquake you'll see it on all these stations," Moran said.

Different types of tools can help scientists interpret a volcano's rumblings too. Moran showed seismometer readings taken on March 11 at Mount St. Helens. Something had caused one of the crater seismometers to spike, in a way that seemed similar to the spikes caused by the sorts of small explosions volcanoes make when they move fluid around and wake up.

But they had other seismometers on the mountain, and tools besides seismometers in the crater. One, an infrasound sensor, can detect the pressure waves caused by sound. It didn't hear anything: There was no explosion.

Similar things can happen on other monitored volcanoes in the Pacific Northwest. The movement of glaciers can show up on seismometers, and those same glaciers can generate icequakes. It can be hard to differentiate an icequake from the sort of small earthquake active volcanoes make — but icequakes are more localized, so having more than one monitor can help.

These tools aren't just for predicting eruptions. Volcanoes don't just build up. As we learned in 1980 from Mount St. Helens, they come down as landslides too. And while the destructive landslides of Mount St. Helens were associated with a volcanic eruption, they can also be triggered by ordinary rainfall and weathering. By placing more monitors on the Cascades' steep peaks, geoscientists will be able to continue to measure active landslides and catch others.

In addition to funding improved volcano monitoring, the bill creates a national Volcano Watch Office. Right now, volcanoes are monitored locally. But during the 2018 Kilauea eruption in Hawaii, the staff needed time off to sleep. Other volcano monitoring stations stepped in to fill the gaps. The idea is that the Volcano Watch Office could do the same.