

## Willamette Week

# Speed Cameras Save Lives. So Why Does Portland Have Only Eight of Them?

*By Nigel Jaquiss*  
*August 28, 2019*

The existing cameras—and any potential expansion—are constrained by a staffing shortage at the Portland Police Bureau.

Ray Thomas says the Portland Bureau of Transportation should erect speed cameras all over town.

"Fixed speed cameras are great," says Thomas, a lawyer who represents victims of car crashes. "They don't discriminate against any socioeconomic group or political profile and provide more deterrence than any other mechanism I know of."

PBOT agrees with him. In a report submitted this year, the bureau told state lawmakers, who greenlighted the cameras' installation in 2015, how well the cameras were working.

"Comparing the change among the 'before' speed study and the most recent speed counts, there is an overall 57 percent decrease in the number of cars traveling over the posted speed limit; [an] 85 percent decrease in numbers of drivers traveling more than 10 mph over the posted speed," the report said.

In a cover story last week ("Blindsided, WW, Aug. 21, 2019), advocates pointed to speeding and drunken driving as top culprits for traffic deaths that have claimed 34 lives so far this year. One possible solution: more DUI enforcement. Another: more fixed speed cameras.

The first problem: Installation of the cameras was slow and limited. It took PBOT more than three years to install the existing eight cameras, which are stationed on either side of four high-crash corridors.

"We should have a lot more," says Scott Kocher, a lawyer active in transportation issues. "That is a no-brainer."

Second, the existing cameras—and any potential expansion—are constrained by a staffing shortage at the Portland Police Bureau and restrictive work rules that permit only cops to review the photos.

"The cameras are very effective," says Capt. Stephanie Lourenco, who leads the bureau's traffic division. "But what we've had to tell PBOT is, 'No more.' We don't have enough people to process the tickets."

The city of Portland has taken extraordinary steps to stop motorists from speeding: It lowered the speed limit on all residential streets to 20 miles per hour last year and has separately obtained the state's permission to lower the limit on nearly 100 other sections of more heavily trafficked roads.

But when it comes to cameras, which researchers around the world say make immediate, significant changes in drivers' behavior, PBOT has moved cautiously.

In 2015, city officials went to Salem asking for a new law that would allow fixed speed cameras (cameras in mobile vans were already allowed).

The city's lobbyist, Elizabeth Edwards, made a powerful case to lawmakers, citing a Portland traffic fatality rate that was higher than those in New York, Chicago, Oakland and Seattle, and 50 percent higher than that in San Francisco.

"Speeding and aggressive driving are the top contributing factors to serious crashes across the region," Edwards said.

The city's argument overcame concerns about invasion of privacy and cash-register-like speed traps.

The new law allowing fixed speed cameras went into effect July 20, 2015. PBOT's installation plan called for it to have eight cameras installed by October 2016. Instead, the bureau installed only two by then. The fourth and final set of cameras didn't issue a ticket until October 2018, 39 months after lawmakers approved the concept ("Slow Going," WW, Nov. 23, 2016).

The cameras were part of Vision Zero, a campaign to eliminate traffic deaths on city streets by 2025. Like the camera legislation, Vision Zero was introduced in 2015.

"Vision Zero is addressing an urgent problem," says Izzy Armenta, a spokesman for Oregon Walks, a pedestrian advocacy group, "but the way transportation bureaucracy works isn't quick."

PBOT spokesman John Brady says logistical challenges are responsible for the slow rollout. "Procurement and planning take a long time," Brady says.

The cameras are also issuing fewer tickets than projected.

One stumbling block is a requirement included in the original legislation that a sworn police officer review all film from the cameras and sign each citation issued (current fine for speeders: \$170 a pop).

Lourenco, the traffic division captain, says the Police Bureau never thought that was a good idea. "PPB didn't want to partner in the project," she says. But it had no choice.

Since then, PPB staffing has shrunk. Five years ago, the traffic division deployed 33 motorcycle cops. Today, Lourenco says, it has the full-time equivalent of 12—and one of them spends a lot of time looking at film. That's a job other cities, such as Denver, employ civilians to do. Portland could too, if lawmakers allowed it. "PBOT issues parking tickets and they have no police power," Lourenco adds.

Margaux Weeke, a spokeswoman for Transportation Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, says Eudaly is eager to do more with speed cameras. "Com. Eudaly supports changing that law so that PBOT could fund more traffic enforcement directly, but as of now it limits the city's ability to expand photo enforcement," Weeke said in a email. In June, Eudaly passed an ordinance that authorized the expenditure of \$15 million over the next five years on red light cameras and fixed speed cameras.

Brady, the PBOT spokesman, says PBOT hopes to deploy cameras at four additional spots next year.

Thomas says that's not enough or fast enough. "The cameras change people's behavior," he says. "We just need more, more, more."

# Cellular Phone Customers Are the Latest Portlanders to See an Unexpected Fee From the Clean Energy Fund

*By Rachel Monahan*

*August 28, 2019*

**A cellphone bill provides the latest evidence that Portland consumers—rather than companies—will pay the tax.**

When Portland resident Pamela Markowitz received her August cellphone bill, there was a charge she hadn't noticed before: 64 cents for the Portland Clean Energy Fund.

The fund was approved by voters in November 2018 as a tax on retail stores that have more than \$1 billion in sales nationally and \$500,000 within the city. Supporters of the measure argued big corporations could afford to pay a 1 percent surcharge on their business license tax to provide improved energy efficiency and other environmental fixes in underserved communities.

Markowitz's bill provides the latest evidence that Portland consumers—rather than companies—will pay the tax. WinCo added a line to customers' grocery receipts earlier this year. And the city itself responded to the tax by hiking its garbage rates by 20 cents a month for the average household.

Markowitz wrote to City Revenue director Thomas Lannon on Aug. 21:

"If I'm being charged by my cellphone company, my garbage company, my cable company, and Lord knows how many other tentacles of corporate America, that means this ballot measure is costing me a fortune, and its recipients are receiving a fortune. Can you please tell me how I obtain a list of all the businesses that are taxing me? I am gobsmacked with anger that this ballot measure is allowed to have such a broad reach. When this measure was proposed, its supporters guaranteed the cost wouldn't be passed to voters. Really?"

Audit supervisor Matthew Thorup replied:

"Unfortunately, we do not have a list of businesses who may be recovering the recently passed Clean Energy Surcharge from their customers by itemizing it on a bill or receipt. Itemizing the surcharge onto a bill or receipt does not shift the burden of paying the tax onto the customers. The Clean Energy Surcharge is a tax on the business. This is just a mechanism a business can use instead of raising their prices."

It's clear some large companies are not, in fact, bearing the burden of the tax. City officials say it's against policy to release a list of taxed companies. But the city doesn't know for sure which companies might pass along the tax to their customers—because it still hasn't finished setting the rules. Construction, insurance and garbage-hauling companies are pushing to be exempted from the tax.

# Critics of ODOT's I-5 Rose Quarter Project Believe The Agency Will Conduct A Full Environmental Impact Statement

*By Nigel Jaquiss  
August 27, 2019*

**They reached that conclusion after an Aug. 7 meeting with senior ODOT staff and Oregon Transportation Commissioners.**

Critics of the proposed \$450 million-dollar expansion of Interstate 5 through the Rose Quarter are convinced state transportation officials are prepared to conduct a full-blown environmental impact study for the project.

They drew that conclusion after an Aug. 7 meeting with senior Oregon Department of Transportation staff and two Oregon Transportation Commissioners at the downtown Radisson Hotel on Southwest Broadway.

ODOT has already completed an environmental assessment. The agency and the Federal Highway Administration are currently considering the public comments received as part of the environmental assessment. They then have two choices: to issue what's called a "finding of no significant impact" or to order a full environmental impact study.

The Aug. 7 meeting was the third in which key stakeholders expressed serious concerns about the project ODOT has proposed.

The group called Albina Vision, for instance, is eager to rebuild the inner North and Northeast Portland neighborhoods decimated by the construction of I-5 and urban renewal projects and says ODOT's ideas fall short. Portland Public Schools has a different concern: Harriet Tubman Middle School, which the district just re-opened, sits adjacent to the project and would be even closer if the lane expansion ODOT proposes moves forward.

PPS laid out its concerns in a July 24 letter sent to U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.)

"Failure to evaluate the Harriet Tubman issues and the express acknowledgement that the issues are significant and should be evaluated, seems to qualify as "failure to consider an important aspect of the problem" and failure to take a "hard look" at the environmental consequences and reasonably evaluate the facts," the PPS letter said.

"The FHWA must adequately address these significant environmental issues and unique student populations in an EIS and not simply accept the incomplete analysis and conclusions of the EA. Therefore, PPS is requesting the assistance of our federal delegation to require a full EIS for the I-5 Rose Quarter Project."

WW spoke on background to several people who either attended or were briefed on the meetings between ODOT and the various stakeholders, who in addition to PPS and Albina Vision included Metro and the offices of Gov. Kate Brown, Mayor Ted Wheeler and Transportation Commissioner Chloe Eudaly.

Moving toward a full environmental impact study would mark a major shift and give critics more time and leverage to shape the project to their liking.

Incoming Oregon Transportation Commission chairman Bob Van Brocklin says no final decision has been made.

In a statement, he alluded to a potential political complication: the Rose Quarter project was earmarked in a \$5.3 billion transportation package lawmakers passed in 2017. One risk in delaying or altering the project is the money might be re-allocated to other needs.

"The Rose Quarter project is a designated project in House Bill 2017," Van Brocklin said.

"Accordingly, as we have told many of our Portland area transportation partners, the OTC and ODOT need to coordinate with the Governor and selected legislators on the question of what kind of environmental review to pursue. Those conversations will occur in September and then we will be in a position to discuss the project further."

## **The Portland Mercury**

### **Trump-Supporting Renewable Energy Advocate Joins Race to Unseat Commissioner Eudaly**

*By Alex Zielinski  
August 27, 2019*

A retired right-wing renewable energy consultant has announced his plans to run for Portland City Council in 2020.

Jack Kerfoot registered a campaign finance committee with the Secretary of State's office on Friday, August 23. He plans on running for the council seat currently occupied by Commissioner Chloe Eudaly, who is planning on running for re-election.

Kerfoot worked in the oil and gas energy industry for 40 years, an experience documented in his book *Fueling America: An Insider's Journey*. Since retiring, Kerfoot has been invited to speak at different events as an expert on renewables, most recently as part of a July City Club panel on the New Green Deal.

In a August 23 Facebook post announcing his campaign, Kerfoot wrote that, "Renewable energy will be a major component in my platform."

"Portland has committed to be 100% renewable by 2035 but has no viable plan to reach this goal," he continued. Kerfoot has not returned the Mercury's request for comment.

Kerfoot's social media presence shows his strong allegiance to Donald Trump. On Twitter, Kerfoot has shared posts by Brietbart and other questionable right-wing websites, applauding the border wall construction, criticizing "obnoxious" female politicians, and spreading conspiracy theories about "illegals."

As of today, the only donation in Kerfoot's campaign coffers is a \$1,000 contribution from his own campaign. He joins two other candidates—banker Kevin McKay and campaign finance advocate Seth Woolley—in the race to unseat Eudaly.

## **The Skanner**

### **Portland Police Conducts Back to School Safety Enforcement Missions**

*August 27, 2019*

The Portland Police Bureau's Traffic Division, Youth Services Division and its three precincts are focused on back to school safety missions as students return to school this week.

Portland Public School students and some private and charter schools are scheduled to go back to school on Wednesday, August 28 while other local school districts, (e.g.: David Douglas, Centennial, Reynolds, Parkrose) will begin after Labor Day.

To increase awareness of the start of the school year, the Portland Police Bureau will be conducting high visibility patrols around all schools as part of its annual "Back to School" safety campaign.

This campaign will kick off on Wednesday, August 28 from 8 a.m. to 8:45 a.m., at Creston Elementary, located at 4701 SE Bush Street. Officers from the Traffic Division and Youth Services Division will welcome students to school and highlight traffic safety around schools.

The Portland Police Bureau Youth Services Division, Traffic Division and precinct patrol officers will be providing a highly visible police presence in and around local schools. Officers, including Photo Radar Units, will be enforcing traffic laws in these zones to reduce the number of crashes in school zones and to create a safe environment for students returning to school.

There will be an emphasis placed on traffic safety and traffic education for the students, bicyclists and drivers of motorized vehicles during the morning hours when students arrive at their schools and in the afternoon hours when the schools dismiss their students.

[Learn more about PPB's Youth Services Division at the official website.](#)

## **OPB**

### **Investigators Believe Fire In NE Portland Is Human-Caused**

*By Rebecca Ellis*

*August 27, 2019*

Investigators with Portland Fire & Rescue say they have reason to believe the fire that sent up a dark plume of smoke visible citywide Monday evening was human-caused. But officials are refraining from calling it arson, as they try to better understand the circumstances surrounding the blaze.

"If this is human set, but an accident and a careless one, that's one thing," said Rich Chatman, a spokesperson for the department. "But if it's human set [by] someone who intended to actually harm those houses that were, and the business that was and the field that was, then we've got a different situation."

The bureau believes the fire began in an old overgrown driving range in Northeast Portland. Wind carried the flames south toward NE 84th Street, where it damaged five town houses and three businesses, including the Grand Avenue Boxing Club, according to Chatman. Two of the

structures were destroyed beyond repair. More than 10,000 homes and businesses temporarily lost power.

The department's remaining tight-lipped as to why it believes the blaze was human-caused. Chatman said officials are hoping for people to come forward with information that could confirm their understanding of what transpired, and don't want to taint the tip pool.

The department is asking people to report any information about the fire's origin to their tip line at 503-823-INFO.