

Oregon News

POLITICS

Editorial: Oregon's massive transportation tax plan needs better guardrails

The Oregonian Editorial Board

Figuring out how to fund Oregon's truckload of transportation needs will be a painful exercise for legislators, who have to negotiate a tricky bipartisan package across divisions marked by geography, politics and even mode of transportation.

But that's nothing compared to [the pain ahead for Oregonians](#) who are being asked to shell out more – as much as \$1.9 billion – per biennium once fully phased in to stave off deep cuts to the State Highway Fund.

The agency also revealed last year it [overestimated federal funding](#) by more than \$1 billion in the current biennium – a sloppy error resulting from a forecast that wasn't reconciled with actual revenue.

And Gov. Tina Kotek is adding to ODOT's financial woes, with her [executive order](#) last December requiring contractors on projects where labor is 15% or more to negotiate agreements with unions regardless of whether they are union shops. The transportation department internally analyzed such agreements in 2022, finding that they chase off potential bidders, reduce competition and drive up costs 10% to 20%, according to an [Oregon Journalism Project story](#).

While the Democratic legislative leaders deserve recognition for tapping **Sen. Bruce Starr, R-Dundee** to lead such a review, it's unfortunate they waited until February to initiate the effort. Accountability must be the foundation for any new revenue package.

Lawmakers also should not ask Oregonians to pay a single dime more as long as Kotek maintains her project labor agreement order. Although funding from the proposed taxes and fees would primarily go to maintenance work handled by state employees, a number of projects would fall in the category covered by Kotek's order. In addition to ODOT's internal study, the agency has already seen [costs soar for one project subject to such an agreement](#). A court order has stayed the governor's order, but that's not a long-term solution. Burdening Oregonians with nearly \$2 billion in new taxes while adopting policies that inflate costs for the benefit of longtime Democratic donors is flatly unconscionable.

But the proposal contemplates expanding transit pass programs and dedicating revenue to salmon restoration to mitigate the effects of tire toxin runoff. Legislators should ask whether other agencies should own these responsibilities and if they would support a new tax specifically for these expenditures. If not, then cut them. New taxes for maintenance and operations should not serve as a convenient way to add or expand nonessential programs.

Oregon governor announces new acting superintendent of Oregon State Hospital

KGW | By Amy-Xiaoshi DePaola

The Oregon State Hospital has a new acting superintendent after an "unexpected patient death" last month and the resignation of its interim superintendent.

Gov. Tina Kotek said she directed Oregon Health Authority (OHA)'s Acting Director to make Dave Baden, the current Deputy Director of Policy and Programs at OHA, acting superintendent, effective immediately.

Kotek stated that she also "directed the agency to make a 30-day plan to address issues related to patient care and safety, effective immediately."

The state's lawmakers are currently [considering changes](#) to Oregon's [civil commitment laws](#) — making forced mental health treatment a more accessible option for people in crisis — but a barrier to expanding civil commitment is the limited capacity in Oregon's secure psychiatric care system. The Oregon State Hospital, for instance, works amid multiple, and sometimes competing, court orders that require criminal aid and assist patients [be admitted in a timely manner](#), that those patients be discharged more quickly regardless of competency, and that counties receive a 60-day notice before a patient is discharged.

On this matter, a federal judge is [considering contempt charges and remedial actions](#) to bring Oregon into compliance with a longstanding court order that requires the admission of mentally ill defendants who are unable to aid and assist with their own defense to Oregon State Hospital within seven days.

[Gov. Kotek replaces Oregon State Hospital head after learning new details about patient death](#)

Oregon Live | By Tatum Todd

Gov. Tina Kotek directed the Oregon Health Authority to replace the head of the state's public psychiatric hospital Friday after learning more details about a recent patient death.

Kotek mandated the leadership change at the [Oregon State Hospital](#) "in the interest of patient safety" less than 24 hours after she learned more about [a patient who died](#) in March after they were placed in a seclusion room, fell to the floor, lost consciousness and were not checked on for hours.

The Oregon State Hospital previously shared that 21 patients have died there since 2020, nine of whom died unexpectedly. And last year federal investigators found that staff failed to perform hourly checks on patients, which contributed to a death in May 2024, investigators concluded.

[Governor Kotek orders leadership change at Oregon State Hospital after patient death](#)

KATU

Governor Tina Kotek has announced a leadership overhaul at the Oregon State Hospital following a recent patient death.

"Today, I directed Acting Director Kautz to make Dave Baden Acting Superintendent of the [Oregon State Hospital](#) after learning more details around a recent fatality. I have also directed the agency to make a 30-day plan to address issues related to patient care and safety, effective immediately," Governor Kotek said. "Patients and their families deserve a hospital that meets the highest possible standard of care."

[Kotek Replaces Leader of Oregon State Hospital in Wake of March Patient Death](#)

Willamette Week | By Aaron Mesh

Gov. Tina Kotek announced late Friday a shakeup in the leadership of Oregon State Hospital as that facility deals with the fallout from a [patient death in March](#).

In a statement released shortly before 9 pm Friday, Kotek revealed that she had accepted the resignation of the hospital's chief medical officer and interim superintendent, Dr. Sara Walker. The governor said that she instructed Oregon Health Authority director Kristine Krautz to place a longtime senior OHA official atop the locked psychiatric hospital in Walker's place.

The locked psychiatric hospital, which has been the subject of nearly continuous litigation due to the difficulty of placing patients there, has also generated widespread safety complaints from staff. *Willamette Week* examined [the deep dysfunction of the hospital](#) in 2023.

[Oregon voter registration errors began years earlier than DMV officials acknowledged](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Julia Shumway

Data entry errors at the Oregon Department of Transportation that led to more than 1,700 people being incorrectly registered to vote despite not demonstrating citizenship began years earlier than the department previously acknowledged, according to a new report released Friday.

Since November, the department has released monthly status reports on its ongoing review of errors that led to people who may not be citizens registering to vote through interactions at the Driver and Motor Vehicle Services Division. The [latest report](#) released Friday found that another 118 people have been wrongly registered to vote.

All but one of the newly discovered individuals interacted with the DMV between 2010 and 2023. Most were found by an automated DMV report that flagged whether someone marked as a citizen in records has since provided records that contradict citizenship, such as a permanent resident card.

Thirteen of those 118 people have voted in one or more elections, the DMV reported. It's a crime for noncitizens to vote in federal or state elections and people who do so risk prison sentences, fines and deportation.

[Editorial: How not to rebuild public trust](#)

The Oregonian Editorial Board

Washington County's Clean Water Services and Multnomah County's Preschool for All program both have work to do in shoring up public trust. But first, their leaders apparently need a refresher course on what exactly that means.

Let's start with Clean Water Services, the sewer agency for more than 600,000 Washington County residents. As [The Oregonian/OregonLive's Jamie Goldberg has reported](#), agency officials freely used ratepayer money, either directly or indirectly, to fund five-star hotel rooms, first-class airfare to Hawaii and tens of thousands of dollars on meals at local restaurants.

But rather than debate ways to improve the proposal at the meeting, the commissioners simply offered up some comments and were ready to move on. They provided bland acknowledgment that public trust must be restored without actually asking anyone to be held accountable or to apologize to ratepayers. Last year, we [wrote an editorial](#) calling out Multnomah County's Preschool for All program for claiming in a quarterly newsletter that it had exceeded its goals for how many preschoolers were served in its first two years.

As we wrote then, the program was actually falling short of the number of seats that [officials had promised to voters](#) who authorized the program in November 2020. But in 2022, Preschool for All officials quietly lowered those targets without alerting the public. Suddenly, when measured against those new goals, the program was overachieving.

[Oregon insiders: Who's who in and around state government](#)

Oregon Capital Insider | By Dick Hughes

Senate President Rob Wagner, D-Lake Oswego, appointed **Sen. Mike McLane, R-Powell Butte**, to replace former Sen. Brian Boquist, R-Dallas, on the Oregon Homeland Security Council.

[Oregon bill could impact local newspapers — have your say](#)

The Bulletin | By Geoff Pursinger

The Oregon Journalism Protection Act would require large online platforms, such as Google, to either pay newspapers for making money off online news articles or contribute to a statewide civic media fund aimed at strengthening local news.

"Local news media is the heartbeat of our small towns in Oregon," said **Senator Dick Anderson, R-Lincoln City**. "...They help connect family-owned restaurants, hardware stores, and fishermen in the community where they serve. But as Big Tech swallows up all the ad dollars, these local media companies are fighting to stay afloat." Under the bill, platforms make direct payments to qualifying news sites and donate to a newly established Oregon Civic Information Consortium, which would issue grants to newsrooms. Platforms would also be required to publish annual transparency reports detailing which news articles they promoted and how compensation was distributed.

[150 cases of officer misconduct caught in limbo in Oregon; bill would fix loophole](#)

Oregon Live | By Maxine Bernstein

The state's law enforcement certification agency — the [Department of Public Safety Standards and Training](#) -- now lacks the authority to review the cases of officers who resign or are fired before they receive their full state certification and are no longer working in law enforcement.

Anderson's case is one of 150 misconduct cases involving police, sheriff's deputies, corrections officers or emergency dispatchers that the Department of Public Safety Standards and Training has put on hold, or what it calls a "deferred" status.

[House Bill 2926](#), introduced this session, would allow the department to investigate such cases. It also would allow the department to deny a recruit further police training or police certification.

[Commentary: Beaver bill moving through Oregon legislature is aimed at improving water quality](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle

On April 8, the House Committee on Climate, Energy, and Environment passed [Senate Bill 3932](#) out of Committee by a vote of 7-4-1 and now heads to the House floor for a vote.

Oregon state legislators are on the verge of doing something historic. To the best of my knowledge, never before has a bill been signed into law anywhere in the country specifically aimed at protecting beaver on public lands with the purpose of improving water quality. The benefits, however, go far beyond just water quality.

HB 3932 is sponsored by Representative Marsh, Gorsek, Golden, Bowman, and Grayber, and joined by fifteen other co-sponsors. The bill digest for HB 3932 reads: "The Act prohibits a person from taking a beaver on public land within certain watersheds or near certain waters."

[As demand for AI rises, so do power thirsty data centers](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle

As the United States works to be a global AI superpower, it's become a home to hundreds of data centers — buildings that store and maintain the physical equipment needed to compute information.

For users of the new and increasingly popular AI tools, it might seem like the changes have been all online, without a physical footprint. But the rise of AI has tangible effects — data centers and the physical infrastructure needed to run them use large amounts of energy, water and other resources, experts say.

[U.S. House passes bill targeting voting by noncitizens, which is already against the law](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Jacob Fischler

The U.S. House passed a bill Thursday to require voters to provide proof of U.S. citizenship when registering to vote, approving a Republican priority over the objections of Democrats who said the bill would only create hurdles for eligible voters without actually improving fraud protection.

[Immigrants without legal status must now register and carry documents, after court order](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Ariana Figueroa

Millions of immigrants in the country without legal authorization are required as of Friday to register with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security after a federal judge rejected advocacy groups' request to pause the requirement.

They'll also have to carry documents proving their registration.

TARIFFS & FEDERAL FUNDING

[How Trump's on-again, off-again tariffs have rattled Oregon small businesses](#)

Oregon Live | By Matthew Kish

She's also among the thousands of Oregon small business owners racing to adapt to a chaotic trade war that [started last week](#) and changes by the day, including [Wednesday](#) and [Thursday](#), when President Donald Trump paused many tariffs but increased tariffs on China to around 145%. A new 10% tariff on most imports also remains in place.

The tariffs will have sweeping impacts on Oregon's trade-dependent economy, but they'll be [particularly bruising for the footwear and apparel industry](#), an economic cornerstone for the state that relies on factories in Asia. Small apparel businesses, like McIlroy's, face added pressure because they don't have the deep pockets and financial flexibility of the industry giants.

Ranson said the 90-day pause on most tariffs announced Wednesday isn't much help. Why place an order with a Vietnamese factory, not knowing whether it will be subject to a 46% tax by the time the order ships?

[Oregon food industry facing extreme uncertainty again, this time from Trump tariffs](#)

Oregon Live | By Lillian Mongeau Hughes

The uncertainty, which is affecting a range of Oregon businesses, is driven by the Trump administration's imposition of broad tariffs and then the rescinding of them, with a promise of bringing them back in a few months. That pause leaves business unsure about long-term outlooks.

Tariffs, said Jason Brandt, president and CEO of the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, are no good for business.

"We believe restaurants will be among the first hit with the cost escalations of food from the tariffs on imports," Brandt told The Oregonian/OregonLive. "Our industry is still recovering from the pandemic. Any cost escalation is very difficult to absorb."

[Trump said cuts wouldn't affect public safety. Then he fired hundreds who help fight wildfires.](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle | By Mark Oladle

President Donald Trump's executive orders shrinking the federal workforce make a notable exception for public safety staff, including those who fight wildland fires. But ongoing cuts, funding freezes and hiring pauses have weakened the nation's already strained firefighting force by hitting support staff who play crucial roles in preventing and battling blazes.

Most notably, about 700 Forest Service employees terminated in mid-February's "Valentine's Day massacre" are [red-card-carrying staffers](#), an agency spokesperson confirmed to ProPublica.

But notwithstanding Trump's stated guardrails, the cuts have affected the Forest Service's more than 10,000-person-strong firefighting force. Hiring has slowed as there are fewer employees to get new workers up to speed and people are confused about which job titles can be hired. Other cuts have led to the [cancellation of some training programs and prescribed burns](#).

Additionally, understaffing in the agency's information technology unit is threatening firefighting operations, according to an agency employee. In December, the branch chief overseeing IT for the agency's fire and aviation division left the job. The Department of Agriculture posted the job opening, describing the division as providing "support to the interagency wildland fire community's technical needs." This includes overseeing software that firefighting crews use to request equipment — everything from fire-resistant clothing to hoses — from the agency's warehouses so first responders have uninterrupted access to lifesaving equipment.

The staffing issues [exacerbate challenges that predate the second Trump administration](#). To address a massive budget shortfall, the Forest Service under President Joe Biden last year paused the hiring of seasonal workers, except those working on wildfires. (Firefighters did see a permanent pay increase codified by [Congress in its recently approved spending bill](#).)

[Oregon trails face threat from federal funding cuts, says nonprofit](#)

KATU | By Victor Park

Oregon's renowned network of trails is at risk due to federal funding cuts, according to the nonprofit organization Trailkeepers of Oregon.

The group, which maintains trails by performing tasks ranging from basic cleaning to complex restoration, told KATU News that it anticipates losing \$500,000 in funding from the Trump Administration.