

Representative Peter A. DeFazio is retiring after serving the people of House District 4 for over 37 years. On March 3 he reviewed his most recent legislative activities with City Club.



Mr. DeFazio focused some of his remarks on the recently passed Investment and Jobs Act which originated in his Transportation Committee in the House. The bill, he said, represented a \$550 billion increase in infrastructure spending. While he noted it was less than the \$600 billion, he was seeking it still represents the largest single investment in infrastructure in several years. He hopes that money from the bill will ultimately find its way to funding improvements in Glenwood, where he helped secure a \$19 million grant recently for improvements in streets and transit.

Although he expressed unhappiness that many of the environmental provisions were stripped out of the bill in the Senate, he said overall it follows his two main principles. First, before building more lane miles, fix what exists today. He described the recent bridge collapse in Pittsburgh as a symptom of the problem with the country's deteriorating infrastructure. "Unfortunately," he said, "that bridge collapse was not unique."

The second principle he pointed to was to look for other alternatives before building more lane miles of highway. Here he pointed to an example in Virginia, where after a study determined that building more miles would leave congestion just where it was in ten years, the state decided to focus on more train miles and "get a lot of cars off the road."

One of the efforts he will be continuing with during the final year of his term is an attempt to reauthorize the Water Resources Development Act. That law, which has funded many environmental projects in Springfield and Eugene—the Springfield Millrace, Delta Ponds and, many years ago, the regional wastewater treatment plant, has not been reauthorized since the 1980s.

He also continues to work on finding funding for a new container port in the North Bend Coos Bay area. Such a port, he said, could add up to 10 percent additional capacity to the western United States. Realistically, he said, there is no other way to significantly increase capacity on the West Coast other than a new container port somewhere. He helped stabilize the rail line that runs from Coos Bay to the metropolitan area and continues to seek funding for what will be a project costing in the range of \$1 billion. Not only would the project provide a greater boost to the south coast economy, but it could make the Eugene/Springfield area a hub for additional manufacturing and transportation facilities that would come to be closer to a new port.

In response to a question from the audience, he continued to express concern about the United States Postal Service. He was sharply critical of the Postmaster General's decision to replace the existing vehicle fleet with 90% internal combustion vehicles and only 19% electric. "While the fossil fuel vehicles may cost less up front," he said, "the long-term savings from reduced maintenance will

offset that quickly.” He was also critical of the requirement that the USPS prepay 75 years of anticipated health insurance costs “a requirement imposed on no other company in the country,” he said. Getting rid of that requirement, he said, would mean that the Postal Service is solvent and not in a persistent fiscal crisis. He is concerned that the actions of the Postmaster General to slow down delivery schedules make no sense. “It takes longer to get a letter from Monticello to Washington DC today, than it did when Washington was President,” he said. He urged the Biden administration to act to replace several members of the Postal Board so that the Postmaster General could be replaced.

When asked what the nation should be doing to prioritize its transportation goals, he pointed to transit, higher speed rail and alternatives to make it safer to cycle and walk, particular for students getting to school. He noted that while some years ago Amtrak had built several sidings on the route from Eugene to Vancouver so that passenger rail could receive the priority to which it is entitled, Union Pacific had defeated that purpose of that change by expanding its freight trains to be over four miles long. “There are no four-mile-long sidings,” so passenger trains get stuck being subordinate to freight.

One issue with high priority on his current agenda is that deployment of 5G cell phone technology near airports. He agrees with the FAA conclusions that that signal might interfere with radar altimeters of commercial aircraft. He said that the military is now doing extensive testing of 5G impact and, said that until those tests are complete, the US should follow the example of European countries where 5G technology is carefully deployed so as not to interfere with activities at airports.

The Congressman was asked directly about his support in the upcoming elections. He was clear that he is supporting Joe Berney to continue on the Lane County Board of Commissioners, and he also has endorsed Val Hoyle, the recent Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries, as his preferred candidate in the democratic primary and general election to replace him.