

California struggling to solve transportation woes

By Dan Walters, Opinion, Mercury News, Tuesday, July 7, 2015

The Legislature and Gov. Jerry Brown have passed a new state budget, and that's that, right?

Not on your sweet bippy, to channel comedian Dick Martin.

The Capitol's politicians left three major budgetary issues undone -- highway maintenance, financing for the Medi-Cal program, and spending \$2-plus billion in "cap-and-trade" fees.

The latter two are fairly straightforward bits of political dealmaking. The issue of highway repairs, however, the subject of a special legislative session called by Brown, is anything but simple.

There is broad agreement on the problem. California's highway system, once the envy of the world, has fallen into disrepair, with spending on maintenance only a third of what's needed.

But there's no agreement on how to raise an additional \$6 billion a year for the state's 10-year restoration plan, the equivalent of hiking gas taxes by 40 cents per gallon.

The Democrats' hopes are embraced in Senate Bill 16, carried by Sen. Jim Beall, D-

San Jose, which would raise about \$3.5 billion a year by hiking gasoline taxes 10 cents a gallon and increasing vehicle registration and license fees.

It's stuck in the Senate because it needs a two-thirds vote and thus at least one Republican senator to pass, plus another two-thirds vote in the Assembly. GOP legislators aren't buying it, at least not yet.

A plan unveiled by the Assembly's Republicans would capture money now being collected from motorists in cap-and-trade fees, recapture \$1 billion in truck weight fees now servicing 2006-vintage transportation bonds, take another \$1 billion from the state general fund, and lay off more than 3,000 Caltrans employees identified by the Legislature's budget analyst as redundant.

While Republicans oppose new taxes, Democrats, including Brown, are equally adamant about not tapping the general fund, so, superficially, it's a stalemate.

Nor is money the only issue. State employee unions would oppose the layoffs and expansion of "public-private partnerships" for highway work sought by the GOP, while

environmental groups would oppose giving highway work relief from the California Environmental Quality Act. And local governments demand a share of any new road revenues.

A compromise is not impossible. At least a few Republicans might support temporary user tax and fee increases, and Democrats might be willing to streamline project handling to get that support.

But it's uncertain how far either party's members could stray from orthodoxy to find the magic recipe that could generate perhaps \$4 billion to \$5 billion year in new revenues, plus other provisions -- such as a guarantee that new highway money wouldn't be diverted elsewhere -- that passage would require.

The only certainty is that if they cannot agree, California's disgracefully shabby roads and highways will continue to deteriorate. Even if they do agree on a 10-year maintenance program, it would be just a stopgap while the state seeks a much-needed, long-term overhaul of transportation financing that moves away from the outmoded gas tax.

Dan Walters is a Sacramento Bee columnist.

http://www.mercurynews.com/opinion/ci_28445792/dan-walters-california-struggling-solve-transportation-woes

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CAPP contact: Charlie Peters

Contacting Jerry Brown Re: "Legislators Tackle Transportation, Health Care Funding in Special Sessions" / KQED, July 3, 2015

From: Jerry Brown <jerry@jerrybrown.org>

To:

Subject: Contacting Jerry Brown Re: "Legislators Tackle Transportation, Health Care Funding in Special Sessions" / KQED, July 3, 2015

Date: Jul 4, 2015 7:28 AM

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Thank you.

Legislators Tackle Transportation, Health Care Funding in Special Sessions

By Marisa Lagos, KQED, July 3, 2015

The state budget may be cooked, but discussions over how to fund two of the state's most important government services — health care services and transportation — are just heating up in Sacramento.

As he unveiled a \$167.6 billion budget deal for the fiscal year that began July 1, Gov. Jerry Brown also announced two “extraordinary” legislative sessions. Brown wants lawmakers to figure out how to pay for repairs to the state's dimly underfunded roads, bridges and highways, and how to make up for a \$1 billion hole in the state's Medi-Cal program that will appear next June.

He's also asking the Legislature to come up for more funding to pay for higher Medi-Cal rates paid to doctors, to boost services for the developmentally disabled and to pay for an expansion of in-home care for disabled adults.

In announcing the special sessions — which are limited to those specific subjects and run at the same time as normal legislative business in Sacramento — Brown said he wanted to separate the two issues from broader budget discussions “so we can really deal with (them) in a thoughtful way.”

“We have to find more resources for our health care and also for our roads and bridges, so there's plenty to do,” he said on June 16 in a state Capitol news conference. “This is difficult, it involves both Republicans and Democrats ... and one way or another we have to find some solutions.”

Lawmakers of both parties agree that the issues at hand are important. Where they disagree is on how to pay for them: Republicans are loath to raise taxes for anything, and believe that all of this should have been dealt with through the normal budget process. (By contrast, Brown and Democratic lawmakers seem happy to push any tax discussions away from the deadline-driven budget discussions.)

‘This is difficult, it involves both Republicans and Democrats ... and one way or another we have to find some solutions.’ Gov. Jerry Brown

But in order to raise taxes, Democrats will need some Republican votes. Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen (R-Modesto) said the minority party stands ready to engage but isn't thrilled with the process.

“We are very disappointed,” she said. “Here we passed a state budget just two weeks ago, and all the issues in these special sessions — transportation and health care — should have and could have been addressed at that time.”

Transportation Needs Staggering

State officials say California's 50,000 miles of highways and nearly 13,000 state-owned bridges have racked up \$59 billion worth of repair needs, after years of declining funding. Annually, they peg that shortfall at about \$5.7 billion — in part because gas tax revenues have sharply declined as cars become more fuel-efficient.

Democrats say they need to figure out a way to replace that declining revenue. Assembly Speaker Toni Atkins (D-San Diego) rolled out a \$2 billion annual proposal in January that calls, in part, for a “road user fee” that her office says would cost most drivers around \$52 a year. State Sen. Jim Beall (D-San Jose), chair of the Senate's transportation committee, wants to raise around \$3 billion a year with a mix of increases to the gas tax, the vehicle license fee and vehicle registration fee. He also wants to charge the

owners of zero-emission vehicles \$100 a year to use the roads, an idea that Brown's administration has flatly rejected.

Olsen and other Republicans say they can find that funding without raising a cent of new taxes. Assembly Republicans unveiled their \$6.6 billion annual plan last month, which includes some items the majority party is unlikely to back. Among those provisions: Taking money from the state's cap-and-trade program aimed at climate change; redirecting \$1 billion a year from the state's general fund; laying off 3,500 Caltrans workers whose positions the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst's Office has suggested are redundant; and eliminating one-quarter of state government's currently vacant positions.

Olsen rejects the notion that the GOP's plan could be untenable to Democrats, saying the Republican caucus worked hard to find a "realistic, credible plan."

'We do not need to raise taxes on hard-working Californians to pay for transportation needs.' Assembly Republican Leader Kristin Olsen

"We do not need to raise taxes on hardworking Californians to pay for transportation needs," she said.

Health Care Funding Drying Up

Like the gas tax, another key funding source — a tax levied on the health plans that manage Medi-Cal — is also drying up. That tax, which nets \$1.1 billion a year to help provide care to one-third of the state's residents, will no longer be allowed under federal rules come next June. The federal government wants the state to assess a more broad-based tax that impacts health plans other than just Medi-Cal.

But Brown has also rolled a few other hot-button issues into this special session: The

ongoing debate over Medi-Cal reimbursement rates; the shortfall in developmental disability service funding created by cuts made during the depth of the recession; and increasing funding for the state's in-home care program for the blind, disabled and elderly. In the budget he signed last month, Brown included a one-year restoration of cuts made to in-home supportive services during the recession, but said that the Legislature needs to figure out a long-term funding stream to make that 7 percent boost permanent.

Olsen said Republicans are still studying the health care issue but reiterated their opposition to raising taxes "for priorities that should have been covered in the budget."

The special sessions began last month, and informational hearings have already begun — but the hard work isn't expected to begin until late August.

<http://ww2.kqed.org/news/2015/07/03/special-sessions-on-health-care-and-transportation>

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Driver killed in tanker crash; Ethanol spill closes road, nearby homes evacuated

By Shavonne Walker, Salisbury Post, April 2, 2015

N.C. Highway Patrol officials have identified the driver of a tanker that overturned on Bringle Ferry Road on Thursday morning, spilling ethanol, as James Richard Sechler, 62.

Sechler, of Shinn Farm Road, Mooresville, was killed when the truck went off the road and overturned.

N.C. Highway Patrol Trooper J.G. Leonard said there is still no indication of what caused the crash. Officials will have to await a report from the medical examiner, which could take weeks.

"Speed does not appear to be a factor. There was no braking prior to impact," Leonard said.

The driver was the only one in the truck, Leonard confirmed.

Emergency crews worked all day to contain the contaminant, which did spill into a nearby creek and onto the ground in the front of a home at 11510 Bringle Ferry Road, near Panther Creek Road and not far west of the Pooletown area. Bringle Ferry Road was blocked off at Panther Creek Road on one end and Surratt Road on the other, while crews continued to work throughout the day.

Leonard said crews remained at the scene until well after 8 p.m., and the road remained closed.

Residents at that home where the crash occurred and at three other nearby homes had to be evacuated until the crash site was cleared and the ethanol removed. One home across the street from the crash was far enough from the road that the property owners did not have to evacuate, but were contained inside their home. No residents were harmed.

The accident occurred around 6:45 a.m., said Frank Thomason, head of emergency services.

The tanker was from a company called Eco Systems based in Franklin, Tenn., but the driver had just returned from a fueling terminal in Denton. Sechler was carrying 8,000 gallons of ethanol. Officials were unsure of how much of that 8,000 spilled onto the roadway.

Sechler was still inside the cab of the tractor trailer for much of the day because crews had to clean up the ethanol spill and roll the tanker over before they could remove his body.

The N.C. Highway Patrol investigated the crash, but because of the fuel spill they were not able to begin an in-depth investigation until late Thursday afternoon. Contributing circumstances to the crash have not yet been determined.

Leonard said officials at the scene said early on they would need to await the arrival of another truck to pump out the remaining fuel before the tractor trailer could be righted. Sometime before 5 p.m., a truck arrived to pump out the remaining fuel.

According to a release from the N.C. Department of Public Safety, the leak was contained before 11 a.m. and the scene around that time was considered safe.

Thomason said there was a potential risk of the alcohol exploding. He said the substance was highly flammable, but crews poured foam onto the truck and liquid. Crews also used absorbent booms to soak up some of the material.

There were 27 agencies on the scene totaling 75 personnel.

Responding from Rowan County: Pooletown Fire, Salisbury Fire, Rowan-Salisbury HazMat team, Rowan County Telecommunications, Rowan County Emergency Services (Emergency Management, Fire, & EMS Divisions), Gold Hill Fire, Liberty Fire, Rowan County Rescue, Miller Ferry Fire, N.C. Highway Patrol, Rowan County Sheriff's Department, Locke Fire, Bostian Heights Fire, Rockwell City Fire, Faith Fire, Granite Quarry Fire, Union Fire and Rockwell Rural Fire;

From state and regional resources: Regional Haz Mat Response Team 7 – Charlotte, N.C. Emergency Management, N.C. Division of Water Quality, Charlotte Fire Department and N.C. Army Air National Guard; N.C. Dept. of Transportation.

From Davidson Country: Healing Springs Fire and Southmont Fire;

And other local resources: The American Red Cross.

Contact reporter Shavonne Walker at 704-797-4253. shavonne.walker@salisburypost.com

<http://www.salisburypost.com/2015/04/03/officials-identify-driver-of-tanker-that-overturned-on-bringle-ferry-road/>

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