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QuickPoint! – Portland’s Temporary Gas Tax Should Stay Just That

By Rachel Dawson

Portland’s temporary gas tax should stay just that: temporary.

Portland voters approved the 10 cent per gallon gas tax three years ago to fund a road repair and traffic safety program. Since its implementation, the program has failed to live up to all expectations.

Gasoline-using vehicles pay for 100% of the tax but only receive a little over half the benefits. Only 56% of tax revenues go to street maintenance projects, while 44% is spent on pedestrian and bicycle safety.

The program is also poorly managed. A 2019 [audit](#) on the tax found that program oversight has been ineffective, many projects have not been completed on time, revenue goals have not been met, and completed projects have cost \$900,000 more than what was told to voters.

City staff admitted that project schedules were not realistic and took longer to begin “[because the scopes of individual projects were not yet well-defined](#).” This lackadaisical approach to project planning would never fly in the private sector, so why is the city getting a pass?

Portland commissioner Chloe Eudaly will send the expiring gas tax back to voters in May 2020. The region needs better roads, not another poorly managed tax. For these reasons, Portlanders should vote “no” on extending the gas tax in 2020.

Rachel Dawson is a Policy Analyst at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research organization.