

Columbia River Historic Highway Collaborative Meeting NotesWednesday, December 9, 2015, Bonneville Dam

Introduction: *The Columbia River Historic Highway continues to grow in popularity as does the Columbia River Gorge in general. The 100th Anniversary of the Historic Highway next year will generate more activity and more vehicles. The highway and supporting infrastructure, including parking areas on the Historic Highway and on I-84 at Multnomah Falls, have a limited capacity which is often reached. This Oregon Solutions project will identify solutions to some of the most immediate short term congestion and safety issues and a means to accomplish such improvements.*

Meeting Objectives: *Become fully aware of the Oregon Solutions process; and, identify the project participants who will ultimately make commitments toward achieving the project objectives through the Declaration of Cooperation. Coordinate logistics, such as: meeting dates and locations, and possible committees. Begin to identify the most immediate short term congestion and safety issues to work on: and, approaches to take in developing potential solutions and where participants can be of help.*

**Welcome and Introductions:**

**State Representative Mark Johnson** and **Multnomah County Commissioner Diane McKeel**

* The co-conveners introduced themselves and their connections to the district and to the project. Both conveners emphasized the need to prioritize short-term solutions to congestion and safety issues through the Oregon Solutions process.

Participants then introduced themselves, along with a brief description of their connection to the Columbia River Historic Highway.

**Oregon Solutions Process and Collaborative Governance**

**Michael Mills,** Project Manager, Oregon Solutions:

* Reviewed meeting objectives
* Described the Collaborative Governance process and the overall objectives of the project

**Background and Context- Project Sponsors**

**Kristen Stallman**,Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Coordinator, ODOT

* Gave background on conditions at the Columbia River Historic Highway, describing this summer as a tipping point.
* Referred to projects under way to address traffic in the gorge, including a preliminary assessment of traffic conducted by ODOT, and the recently initiated Columbia River Gorge Transit Study. Kristen described this problem as an opportunity.
* Described the background and purpose of the Oregon Solutions collaboration.

**Lynn Burditt,** National Scenic AreaManager, USFS

* Described the challenges, concerns and opportunities of this project from the perspective of USFS as stewards of the National Scenic Area.
* It will take the cooperation of many agencies to address these issues, and create a productive, safe experience for visitors.
* Expressed concern for overall visitor experience if reasonable capacities are exceeded. Described the initial intension of limited parking as part of a management plan intended to strike a balance between bringing in visitors without negatively impacting the space.
* Brought up the need to distinguish between the various studies and processes intended to address short-term, mid-term and long-term congestion and safety issues in the gorge, as these could be confusing to stakeholders and the public.

**Kristin Dahl,** Director, Destination Development, Travel Oregon

* Gave background on Travel Oregon, the impact of their Seven Wonders campaign and their upcoming Gorge Tourism Studio. They will now focus *less* on the high congestion areas.
* The top issues which Travel Oregon identified in their stakeholder assessment for the Gorge Tourism Studio were congestion and infrastructure concerns such as restrooms.
* Potential solutions- engaging private sector, promoting fall and spring season tourism.

**Kevin Price**, District Manager, Oregon Parks and Recreation (Previously disclosed work conflict).

**Short term congestion and safety issues discussed:**

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| **Issue** | **Discussion/actions** |
| **Parking** | * Whole Historic Highway, not just Multnomah Falls |
| **Bicycles and Pedestrians** | * How to safely manage bicycle traffic * Pedestrian traffic, particularly walking on the road after parking on the shoulder. * Pedestrians crossings, with or without crosswalks |
| **Parking hitting capacity and potential for traffic to back up onto I-84** | * Advanced warning that parking is full. * Software concerns- are boards up to date? * Even when people are warned, many still wait. |
| **Tour bus safety** | * Does tour bus parking reach capacity? If so, where would they park? * 20,000 motor coaches travel Portland area annually, and half of them go to the gorge. |
| **Emergency Vehicles** | * Corbett Fire Department, response delays due to traffic. * If emergency at Multnomah Falls, response time reduced. |
| **User Experience** | * What the scenic area is all about is getting away from it all. |
| **Lack of Public Transportation** | * Encouraging a mode shift. * If there was public transport available, would people use it? * Corbett residents are concerned that homeless people from Portland would take public transport to the Gorge. |
| **Increased environmental impact, particularly in riparian and sensitive areas** | * Illegal trash dumping is a big issue for USFS. * Trail bike damage. * Stepping off trail, cutting switchbacks, causes erosion. |
| **General overuse/ Number of People** | * The question was raised as to whether the group is talking about accommodating more people, or better managing the parking and safety for the existing number of visitors. * Even if parking was just fine but we brought in 20,000 more people, that would be that many more people with a greater impact on the area and environment. * USFS expressed that they are already at their limit in terms of how many people the land can accommodate and manage sustainably at certain locations. * Explore ways to allow more visitors while keeping number of visitors at one time static though incentives for shorter duration visits? Congestion Management. |
| **Seasonality/Marketing** | * Shoulder season and winter months are not the problem * Market shoulder and off seasons. Incentives? |
| **Legal regulation** | * What can we legally regulate? What authority is available for managing visitors? What would we want to see improved in terms of management *if* we had the authority? What is necessary to achieve these desired management tools? * Can we create vehicle weight limits? * Private motor coach tours furthers our goal, better to have 30 people on a bus than 30 vehicles. * Can there be a prohibition on single occupancy vehicles? |
| **Data availability** | * Do we have any numbers to know what we can anticipate? This helps to understand the magnitude of the problem. * If not, we’ll be talking/guessing on hypothetical solutions. * Action item for next summer: gather more complete data. |
| **Limited Sheriff availability to enforce parking** | * There is only one FTE sheriff for the district, so there is limited ability to monitor parking rules, tow cars, etc. |

**Solutions Discussed**

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| **Solution** | **Discussion/Actions** |
| **Timed limited parking and/or metered parking** | * Visitors would stay less time if they had parking time limits, with closer spots having shorter limits, and longer-term parking spots further away. Create incentives for turnover. * What would it take to establish time limits and/or metered parking spots? What jurisdictions would need to authorize? * ODOT, City of Portland, Railroad all have jurisdiction. * Congestion Parking. Charge more for parking at peak times, less or free at off peak hours. This would create revenue that can be used for enforcement and other solutions. * Could require motor coaches to have parking passes, possibly cheaper or free in the off-season. * If there were a charge to pay in some places, need to better regulate and enforce parking rules. Sheriff volunteers? * Congress has said that forest service cannot charge parking fees or entrance fees. Are there exceptions? * It is possible for a time limit on the I-84 lot, state-owned. * Could we say that people need a NW forest pass? What is necessary to implement? * USFS: Nationally, we’re supposed to have an advisory committee to consider new options around fees, but these positions have not been appointed in Oregon. * What about buying/reserving an online parking pass ahead of time? The site could tell people if all the passes for the day are sold out; plan your trip concept. |
| **Provide information about alternative recreation options at Multnomah Falls Gate** | * This could improve user experience and give people a suitable alternative location. |
| **Shuttle from Rooster Rock State Park** | * Rooster Rock State Park charges a fee now. * Benson Lake has a fee lot, walking distance to the falls. * Maybe the payment to park can supplement a shuttle. * Is this convenient? Would people use it? |
| **Make the road one way, with only one lane open** | * Would need to contact SHPO to make any changes because of historic values designation. * The other lane could be used for parking, or for bicycle and pedestrian traffic. (And, passing emergency vehicles?) * Concerns were raised about making the other lane open for parking, as it could increase the number of visitors and would change the look of the highway. (Limited parking?) |
| **Improve pedestrian access over or under the road at Multnomah falls?** | * What would this look like? Timeline? |
| **Continue to place boulders to discourage unsafe parking** | * Quick, simple solution. |
| **Design formal parking in areas which could accommodate it** | * Oneonta Gorge parking is one big space, currently a free for all. Work with ODOT to create identifiable parking spots. |
| **Improve parking signage** | * Signs for designated parking spots * Post “Park only in designated spots” signs |
| **Shuttles from Troutdale, Fairview and/or Wood Village** | * There is some momentum from these cities to provide parking / shuttle to the Gorge, at least for this summer. * When people see that the Gorge is full, many jump off at Troutdale. How do we get them to the Gorge? |
| **Individualized marketing plans- Travel Oregon** | * Promoting different transportation options, rideshares? * Promotional materials can cover ‘recreating with respect.’ * Reaching out to recreational partners to provide consistent messaging around parking, safety, staying on trail, etc. |
| **Managing Demand/ Marketing for different times of day and season** | * Create stargazing programs in the evening * The lodge could do early bird specials * Morning ranger program * Financial incentives to visit early/late, rather than mid-day * ODOT is adjusting their 100 year celebrations toward a ‘Season of Celebration,’ rather than concentrating events in the middle of summer. Include parking information with promotional materials. |
| **Conduct a road safety audit along entire stretch** | * An interdisciplinary group would look at the whole area and provides safety recommendations – usually pretty quick, done in a few months. Not sure if it’s been done already, but could use that process. * ODOT- not a lot of accidents on there, so they don’t see it as a safety issue. Traffic is too slow. |
| **Create a tour leaving from downtown Portland** | * 9 am to 3 pm, picking people up, on-off service, stopping at various stops, getting off Westbound. |
| **Create public transportation options from downtown Portland** | * If so, possibly reduce parking spots to compensate for the number of people riding the shuttle? * Address this concern by focusing on mitigation—enforce parking rules, increase boulder placement, signage. * Explore ways to maintain visitor level maximums while encouraging people coming in different ways. * Public transportation addresses access equity issues, as current tours to the Gorge are quite expensive. |
| **Utilize technology to communicate traffic and/or parking conditions** | * Build an app based on user-reporting of current conditions * App could show peak times and off times for different locations. * Real time parking information like on PDX website * There is already a trip check site where you can see the I-84 parking lot. * Users can also check google maps for current conditions. * Utilize Waze app- community-based traffic/navigation app. |
| **Variable Messaging signs** | * Extend the reach of the VMS’s. |
| **Provide up to date traffic information on AM radio** | * The concern was raised that some people do not have AM radio in their cars. |
| **Develop consistent messaging across agencies** | * “Don’t love the gorge to death,” for example. Promoting responsible enjoyment of the gorge, promoting the area to locals in the off season. * Appreciate the common message, but I don’t want a common message that starts off with ‘don’t.’ * If visitors know the issues, they’ll take better care. * How about ‘Recreate with Respect’? |
| **Host car-free events, like those at Crater Lake** | * Having these events could be a way to test going car free on the highway and see how it impacts visitorship. * Consider national bike campaign for overnight stays. |
| **Sherriff’s office suggestions** | * We could train more volunteers, who can facilitate traffic flow, issue parking citations, call a regular deputy. If well marketed, we could come up with a dozen volunteers. * There is a volunteer group from Corbett who could help with enforcement, or create college internships. * Create a communications plan to be proactive leading up to and planning for special events. * Dedicate a reserve deputy or volunteers if we plan for specific events ahead of time. * Build up our reserves, it takes two years to train reserves. * Education fliers about towing potential |
| **Communication with the community leading up to events** | * Facebook groups: ‘Corbett Area,’ ‘Corbett Oregon’ are both good ways to communicate with the community * Corbett forum is another good way to communicate. Fliers have not been effective |
| **Map app (Travel Oregon? Not sure)**  **Gorge Trip App?** | * Discover the Gorge, possible January release date. * Gathering data from all the land management agencies in the Gorge so all recreation sites can be accessed on one site. * Add messaging that you have to look at before accessing app. |
| **Travel Oregon Ideas** | * De-emphasize the Gorge as a 7 wonder (emphasize the less visited sites in the Gorge). * Engage with private sector companies such as Uber, Zipcar, to encourage carpooling to the Gorge. * Communicate best times to go, with technological solutions included in communications. Saying, ‘check google maps for congestion’ for example. * Advertise/market little hidden areas. Product development. Long-term there need to be other hiking solutions. If we’re not investing in future recreation infrastructure, our current ones will be overburdened. |
| **Traffic Management: Volunteers, Cross-walks, Traffic Management Teams** | * Volunteers could direct traffic at busy intersections. * Install a push-button crosswalk. * ‘Traffic management teams,’ modeled off of Yosemite. They have done traffic modeling to understand people’s patterns, and now know that when so many people pass their entrance stations, they need to send out traffic management teams to certain parking areas. |
| **Surveillance cameras** | * 30-40 incidents of theft per month in summer time. * Caution, want to preserve the beauty of the area and cameras could be disruptive of that. |
| **Ongoing collaborative effort to address long-term issues** | * Partner and/or communicate with existing groups already working on long-term issues. * Solutions should include ongoing monitoring, evaluation, regrouping of implemented solutions. * Sandy River Collaborative could provide a good model for an ongoing collaborative group or governance structure. |

**Action items:**

At the end of the meeting, participants discussed action items which could be accomplished before the next meeting. These included:

* Put project information on a common website where participants can access it.
* Find out if we can partner with Rooster Rock State Park as a shuttle service site.
* Contact private partner companies who might potentially run a shuttle—Travel Oregon volunteered to talk to tour providers.
* Commissioner McKeel volunteered to contact Troutdale, Fairview and Wood Village about creating park and ride options. She hopes to find out more about what they’re envisioning.
* Commissioner McKeel also volunteered to work with Monte and the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office to increase the number of volunteers working in the gorge during this upcoming season of high use.
* Assess which areas attract the most illegal parking.
* Assessment of existing signage and signage needs.
* Find out if it’s possible to restrict the number of tour buses that come in any given day, if single-occupancy vehicles could be prohibited or if vehicle weight limits can be instituted. This is a complex piece in terms of jurisdiction, involving ODOT and USFS.
* Look into the possibility of a road safety audit.
* Seek out approximate estimations of visitor volume for the upcoming summer.
* Would it be possible to put together a 1-2 page fact sheet of what we can and can’t do in terms of parking restrictions? USFS said they would work on this, but not sure they can complete before the next meeting. If not, perhaps others can pursue the following items:
* What is required to implement timed parking spaces? Whose jurisdiction?
* Is it possible to implement time limits on the I-84 parking lot? ODOT’s jurisdiction.
* Find out if it is possible to require a NW Forest Pass to park on Historic Highway.

**Potential Subcommittees discussed**

* Private Shuttle Service Possibilities Subcommittee
* Parking Restriction/Fee/Pass Possibilities Subcommittee

**Future meeting dates:**

Before the meeting came to a close, Michael facilitated discussion around future meeting dates, locations and which meeting might be public. Participants discussed the following tentative dates:

* Tuesday, January 19th, 1-4 pm, Bonneville?
* Tuesday, March 9th or 10th 1-4 pm, Bonneville? (Note: *Revised*)
* Tuesday, April 19th, Bonneville? (possibly before evening public meeting?)
* Thursday, May 12th

There was some discussion at the end of the meeting about the purpose and intention behind having a meeting that is open to the public. Susan Law suggested an alternative format of a ‘Virtual Open House,’ to inform the public and collect input. An example of this format can be found here:  <http://3pvisual.com/projects/lakelowell/comments.aspx>.

**Attendees at 12.09.15 meeting:**

* State Representative Mark Johnson (52nd District), Co-convener
* Multnomah County Commissioner Diane McKeel, Co-convener
* Kate Sinner, Regional Solutions Coordinator, Office of Governor Kate Brown
* Petra Hackworth, Travel Oregon
* Kristin Dahl, Director, Destination Development, Travel Oregon
* Susan Law, Western Federal Lands Highway Division, WFLHD, Federal Highway Admin
* Cassie Kornacki, Legislative Aid, Representative Mark Johnson (via telephone)
* Victoria Purvine, Corbett resident / community leader
* Patrol Captain Monte Reiser, Multnomah County Sherriff’s Department
* Kristin Austin, US Forest Service, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area
* Lynn Burditt, Scenic Area Manager, USFS
* Kristen Stallman, Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area Coordinator, ODOT
* Stan Hinatsu, Recreation Planner, USFS, CRG National Scenic Area
* Karyn Criswell, ODOT Region 1
* Michele Spatz, Mobility Manager, MCEDD
* Terry Cullen, Principal Planner, Columbia River Gorge Commission
* Joanna Valencia, Senior Transportation Planner, Multnomah Co. Transportation Planning
* Kate Sappell, Executive Assistant/Constituent Relations, Office of Comm. Diane McKeel
* Scott Maguire, Office of Senator Jeff Merkley
* Jagjit Nagra, Field Representative, Office of Senator Jeff Merkley
* Michael Mills, Oregon Solutions
* Liz Oberhausen, Oregon Solutions

**Unable to attend:**

* Kevin Price, Oregon State Parks District Manager, Columbia River Gorge District
* Sherriff Matt English, Hood River County Sheriff’s Office
* Phil Chang, Field Representative, Office of Senator Jeff Merkley
* Kelly Brooks, ODOT Region 1, Enhance Program Manager
* Andrew Plambeck, ODOT Region 1, Government Liaison (Alternate)
* Rick Buck, Multnomah Falls Lodge Concessionaire

Special thanks to the US Army Corps of Engineers for hosting the meeting at Bonneville Dam.

Post Meeting Comments:

… I think we have the right people in the room to address the issue. The challenge will be focusing on what is actually doable in the timeframe we have available prior to next season. Therefore, I would suggest (with Commissioner McKeel’s blessing) that at the next meeting we only discuss and focus what can conceivably be implemented to address the over-crowding issue in the next high use period. Long term solutions will need to wait for another day. In order to do this I believe we need to know exactly what actions can legally be taken by ODOT, State Parks, Forest Service and the Gorge Commission. Perhaps we can have the various representatives bring their list of potential actions and we can build the plan from that? We also need to clearly understand what plans some communities like Troutdale and Wood Village are considering so we can see how we can support their efforts. Just some thoughts, Rep. Mark Johnson

I agree with Rep Johnson. I also think we had a very good discussion at the last meeting, but need to focus on what is doable in the short term. That is why my suggestions were to talk with Troutdale, Fairview and Wood Village about their potential plans to provide parking and shuttle service. Also, how to work with Monte and the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office to increase the number of volunteers working in the Gorge during this upcoming season of high use. … others should be brought to the table. I am sorry that I will not be able to attend the January meeting, but look forward to hearing the outcome. … Commissioner Diane McKeel