



**Government Camp
Summit Rest Area
Redevelopment
Assessment Report**
Oregon Solutions | January 2021

Acknowledgements

Oregon Solutions greatly appreciates all those who generously gave their time to inform this assessment and report.

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1. INTRODUCTION

During winter 2020, staff from Timberline Lodge in Government Camp, Oregon, reached out to Oregon Solutions for help rethinking infrastructure on Mount Hood. Timberline staff was concerned that the public rest area at Government Camp is old and in poor condition, causes traffic challenges, and is in such high demand that it taxes the capacity of the adjoining Summit Ski Area parking lot, especially for truck traffic. Other stakeholders are concerned that the increasing pass-through and visiting traffic to the mountain are creating safety issues and high greenhouse gas levels they want to see reduced.

A recent change to a concession of a ski slope at Government Camp and a transit planning effort related to Mount Hood have spurred discussion about improving the mountain's infrastructure. Because of this discussion, sponsors of this Oregon Solutions assessment wanted to find out if there was enough interest from key stakeholders like ODOT, the US Forest Service, Clackamas County, Oregon Travel Information Council, and Western Federal Lands Highway Division to work collaboratively toward a signed agreement outlining "roles and responsibilities, funding, and a timeline for the [redevelopment of] the [public] rest area" at Government Camp. Other stakeholders who met with Oregon Solutions on January 30, 2020, were also interested in collaborative efforts to improve transit to the mountain, to explore rest area needs for the community of Government Camp itself, and to improve workforce housing. When the pandemic broke out in March 2020, Oregon Solutions was poised to take on an assessment of the project, which was deferred until the fall.

This assessment is the result of Oregon Solutions' effort to determine if there is enough meaningful interest to establish a collaborative project among diverse public, private, and civic partners to organize and prioritize strategies that would address these objectives. This assessment explores our findings and recommendations.

ABOUT OREGON SOLUTIONS

Oregon Solutions is the state of Oregon's program to help communities address community-based problems and opportunities through sustainable solutions. We do this by creating a collaborative platform where businesses, governments, nonprofits, community-based organizations, sovereigns, and other stakeholders can align resources and pool efforts to achieve desired results.

OUR PROCESS

Oregon Solutions' engagement starts with an assessment. When invited, Oregon Solutions begins an assessment to explore whether and how a collaborative approach might be structured to address a particular community issue. The assessment is composed of a series of one-on-one or small group interviews. If an assessment finds there is a project that can be conducted by Oregon Solutions, it will go before the governor for consideration of a designation as an Oregon Solutions project.

2. METHODS

In October through November 2020, Oregon Solutions conducted twenty-eight interviews with a wide range of stakeholders and partners to fully assess the needs, issues, opportunities, history, willingness, and interest of parties to engage in work on addressing infrastructure improvements at Government Camp. Subjects were sent a list of questions in advance, which were followed up by interviews that lasted forty-five to sixty minutes each. Oregon Solutions has aggregated the responses of interviews in this document. No comments are attributed to any individual. See appendix A for a list of interviewees and appendix B for a list of interview questions.

3. OVERVIEW

Mount Hood is one of Oregon's most recognizable and visited icons, renowned for its beauty and as a gateway to a wide variety of outdoor activities. State Highway 26 accesses the west and south sides of Mount Hood, making it a popular travel corridor between the Willamette Valley and central Oregon for passenger and commercial vehicles. It is also a major recreation artery feeding a vast network of smaller roads and recreation facilities across the Mount Hood area.

The mountain pass at the top of State Highway 26 holds a complex confluence of infrastructure, including the following:

- The busy residential and commercial districts of the community of Government Camp, including a resort, dozens of seasonal rental properties, a variety of visitor services and retail establishments, and two major highway access intersections;
- An intersection and turn-off to Timberline Lodge, a major ski resort and national historic landmark;
- An intersection and turn-off to SkiBowl, a major ski resort;
- The heavily-used Mirror Lake trailhead and related parking plaza;
- Access to the Summit Ski Area, a smaller ski day lodge immediately adjacent to the highway, (some interviewees feel this area has potential for redevelopment);
- An Oregon Department of Transportation highway maintenance substation; and
- The Government Camp summit rest area, which includes a restroom, parking lot, and information kiosk. Sustained heavy use of this rest area by commercial freight carriers and the general public—and years of deferred maintenance—leave it in need of attention. The rest area receives about 600,000 visitors per year, and it costs

the Oregon Travel Information Council \$300,000 per year for annual operations and maintenance.

Today, there is growing interest from public agencies, ski operators, elected officials, residents, landowners, and other stakeholders to improve the area's transportation infrastructure, including expanding public transit access, improving rest areas, providing safer traffic access into and out of Government Camp, constructing an aerial gondola connecting Timberline and Government Camp, and implementing strategies that reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions in an era of growing population.

4. ASSESSMENT FINDINGS

4.1. High level of alignment and interest

There is a remarkable level of alignment and interest among the parties about what needs to happen to address the complex set of needs facing this area. Agencies, ski area operators, elected and local and county officials, and others have worked together closely over the years on a variety of transportation and other projects in this area and have, for the most part, achieved a solid working level of trust and respect.

All interviewees pointed to the need to address the location and function of the current Government Camp summit rest area as a keystone to being able to address other needs in the area.

Some are adamant that any project must be about more than just rest area redevelopment or relocation. There is a range of opinion about what the scope of a project should be. (See section 4.3. Possibilities and project elements.)

Some are uncertain about the sequencing of work on project elements: what should be done on the ground first, what assurances would be given that other pieces would follow.

Some describe planning fatigue from having participated in other public processes that did not produce results.

There is a range of understanding about the jurisdictional roles and motivations of various players—and some tension between agencies and within agencies related to available resources, workloads, and priorities.

Some interviewees question the ability, resources, and governance of any group to sustain the kind of effort it will take to produce results. However, there is clear and unanimous agreement that the time is at hand (or may be passing by) to address these needs while they are still cost-effective and manageable; and all interviewees are willing (and even eager) to be part of a process that sincerely addresses the needs, but none in a solo lead role.

4.2. Project lead reluctance

Along with the complexity of ownership and jurisdiction related to the rest area and other project elements, there is a clear awareness among the various players that there is no one single entity that has the legal authority to lead this work. Nor is there any single entity that has the capacity and readiness to take on a project of this scope. Each of the primary jurisdictional organizations has said they do not see themselves in a lead role either due to limited resources or legal authority or both. Interviewees expressed the following limitations:

- The US Forest Service is not in the business of building or maintaining rest areas, though they do grant the special use permit for rest areas and other infrastructure use on national forest land.
- The Oregon Department of Transportation is not in the business of building or maintaining rest areas, does not have resources, and is not interested in taking a leadership role.
- The Oregon Travel Information Council, which operates the Government Camp summit rest area, is not in the business of developing new rest areas, is facing budget limitations, and is implementing an eight-year program of maintenance on the rest areas it already manages.
- Clackamas County fought hard to keep the rest area open in 2012 and is not in a position to take the lead on relocating it, nor do they have the resources to do that work.

Timberline Lodge, which now holds the special use permit for both the property on which the rest area is located and the adjacent Summit Ski Area, is interested in redeveloping Summit Ski Area to extend the business district of Government Camp east into the area and is interested in building a gondola that links Government Camp and Timberline. But the rest area now occupies the space necessary for those changes, and Timberline is not in a position to solely undertake an effort of this magnitude.

Over the last eighteen months, Timberline has studied solutions that involve relocating the Government Camp summit rest area and has hosted briefings with various stakeholders. Those briefings have increased awareness, interest, and general support, but have failed to generate interest by any single organization to lead the work or confidence in any alternative governance structure that could see this through.

4.3. Possibilities and project elements

All of the interview subjects have awareness of the basic elements or ingredients of the big picture of possible related moving parts in the Government Camp area, which include the following:

4.3.1. Relocation of the rest area and site redevelopment

The Government Camp summit rest area is a keystone property that, if relocated, would allow other infrastructure to develop in the area. Timberline holds the special use permit for the immediately adjacent Summit Ski Area. The rest area parking is currently indistinguishable from parking for Summit Ski Area.

If the rest area were relocated, Timberline would likely make significant investments in the former Summit Ski Area day lodge, which they believe would breathe new life into the ski area. Timberline has also expressed interest in using some of the property that would become available as a landing spot for the gondola, for possible transit hub development, or for pedestrian-friendly expansion of the Government Camp business district.

4.3.2. Development of public restrooms for Government Camp

There are currently no public restroom facilities in the Government Camp business district. Local businesses all post “no public restroom” signs in their front windows. When someone asks for a restroom, they are directed up the street to the rest area. Local businesses and residents are concerned the loss of the rest area would, impact sanitation, and increase public pressure on businesses to allow use of private restrooms.

Interviewees report that any set of solutions for these issues needs to include a restroom facility to meet the needs of the business district. Concerns were voiced about the funding equity associated with operation and maintenance of a facility used primarily by pass-through travelers (as opposed to solely meeting the needs of local customers). The funding equity issue is alive today because all of the waste generated by pass-through travelers using the current rest area is processed through the Government Camp sewage treatment facility, which is solely supported by rate payers.

Concerns were also raised about the timing and sequencing of when facilities would come on line. One interviewee said, “Don’t turn off the toilets at the rest area until there are new toilets ready to turn on at a new rest area, because [Government Camp] would be slammed with users.”

4.3.3. Creation of paired rest areas to the east

The majority of interview subjects were aware of conversations about improving safety by creating a pair of rest areas to the east that would allow eastbound travelers to exit and enter a rest area on the south side of the highway, and westbound travelers to exit and enter a rest area on the north side. (Currently, eastbound travelers have to enter and exit the existing rest area by crossing Highway 26, which is not signaled or controlled.) Paired rest areas would eliminate the need for users to cross traffic flow. This approach would also relocate the existing high intensity slow-moving vehicle and pedestrian uses around Government Camp to a more remote setting.

A potential site for a paired rest area exists about two miles east at the turn off to Trillium Lake (to the south), and access to the Snow Bunny snow park (to the north). Snow Bunny is currently part of a special use permit held by Timberline. Concern was raised about

establishing some type of liability protection for rest area use that would shield the permit holder and private operator.

At least one interviewee wondered why a rest area is needed at all in this general vicinity, and suggested it be shifted to the south (Bear Springs or Frog Lake) or to the east—areas that are already served by electricity, are relatively flat, and exist at a lower elevation reducing the amount of snow removal required and overall complexity associated with winter operations.

4.3.4. Establishment of transit hub or transit exchange

All interviewees voiced strong concerns about the dramatic increases in traffic and congestion in this area in recent years. At least one public transit district has had an opportunity to establish a scheduled bus route connecting Government Camp to other communities (which would serve workforce and recreation use) but has opted not to do so because of challenges with maintaining a schedule. Peak period traffic creates hours-long traffic snarls rendering public transit options unpredictable and impractical.

Some interviewees felt that creating an attractive, safe, central transit exchange or transit hub where incoming buses could arrive and depart on regular schedules—met and fed by local shuttles operated by resorts or communities—would create a transit circulatory system connecting the mountain to the Columbia Gorge, to Portland, and to central Oregon for recreationists, residents, and tourists.

Timberline Lodge has expressed interest in dedicating a portion of the property it operates under the special use permit for transit hub development. A significant amount of planning work would be necessary to further develop these ideas. Some work was done in past years related to possible transit facilities in the Government Camp vicinity (but not adjacent to the business district). That work has not led to action. Transit planners strongly suggest any transit hub be kept near commercial development to best meet passengers' needs.

Other transit infrastructure could include a significant mass parking facility to the east in the Rhododendron area that would be a kind of transfer center or park-and-ride that would feed public transit operations from the Portland area to the mountain.

There is no clear understanding or agreement on how to sequence or resource the work necessary for any of these improvements. Similar approaches have been successful in alpine ski areas across the west and in Europe. All interview subjects have ideas and excitement about addressing the rest area to create other opportunities.

ODOT is currently leading a planning process called Vision around the Mountain to assess many of these opportunities. Most of the stakeholders we interviewed are participating in that process. We connected with leaders of the process and believe these efforts to be strongly complementary.

4.4. Opportunities and strengths

Given sufficient political and financial support, the opportunity exists—and the relationships feel sturdy and in place—to undertake a program of work that prepares the Government Camp area for growth and change by addressing key visitor infrastructure features, including rest areas, public transit, highway safety improvement, and commercial development that would enhance the destination nature of the area while also addressing through-travel transportation needs.

A collaborative process could help to accomplish the following: frame the overall scope of the work; begin to identify cost and sequence of the elements; clarify expectations and roles; and establish a governance mechanism to implement and oversee the work.

4.5. Cause for action is clear

Anyone who drives through the Mount Hood Highway 26 corridor or is connected with Government Camp is well aware of the significant travel bottleneck and traffic-related limitations that are complicating recreational and commercial travel, and impacting local businesses, visitor attractions, and residential areas.

4.6. Opportunities for workforce and equitable access

Improvements to traffic congestion and flow will likely lead to scheduled transit service connecting the south and east sides of the mountain, opening up new opportunities for employees and underserved Oregonians to access workplaces and recreation.

4.7. Ski area operators and local community are supportive

All three ski area operators (Timberline, SkiBowl and Mount Hood Meadows) are aligned on the importance of this work, as is the citizen participation organization for Government Camp. The public agencies are willing to engage in—but not lead—an effort like this.

4.8. Congressional delegation and state legislators are supportive

Staff members for Oregon’s Congressional offices we spoke with were supportive of moving forward with this work and pledged their assistance in pursuing federal grant funding as part of an eventual funding package. State legislators also voiced strong support and may be in a position to provide leadership capital and, eventually, assistance with securing state funding.

4.9. Sufficient public permission to proceed

With a transparent process and engagement of key constituencies, we believe there is sufficient public permission to begin planning work on a first phase of the project—identifying solutions for relocating the rest area.

5. CHALLENGES

5.1. Absence of leadership

The most frequently mentioned challenge or barrier to this effort is the absence of leadership going forward. Jeff Kohnstamm and Jon Tullis at Timberline have provided most of the leadership energy to date (which has been appreciated by all), but they do not have public authority to undertake certain aspects of this project, and they might be perceived by some as beneficiaries who are too close to the project to serve in a primary leadership role.

Gaining and holding the attention and resources of any of the public agencies—particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic—were the next most-cited barriers, and were confirmed through conversation with each agency. A clear political mandate that can be maintained over time will be necessary to align and motivate the agencies to dedicate sufficient administrative, technical and political capital to get this done.

5.2. A complicated puzzle of scope and roles

Agreeing on the scope of this project will also be a challenge. For a few interviewees, the project is just about the rest area. For many, the rest area is part of a bigger picture. Defining the needs, scope, and roles early on will be crucial.

5.3. Absence of governance structure

There is a lack of existing authorities for a clear governance structure, which will likely be needed in order for this project to go forward. Options for creating a governance structure could include creating a special district or public-private association, receiving direct legislative authority, or some other structure. Establishing a governance structure early on will be essential.

6. POTENTIAL PATHWAY FORWARD

A near-term opportunity exists to apply for a Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant administered by the Western Federal Lands Division of the US Federal Highway Administration to undertake feasibility planning related to rest area relocation. The grant deadline for FLAP funding will be in March 2021. Additionally, the Government Camp summit rest area has already been approved for a 2018 FLAP grant that was initially requested for repaving. According to FLAP officials, it may be possible to suspend or repurpose the \$2.1 million repaving grant. Combined with a new grant focused on relocation, that would create sufficient funding (requiring a 10 percent non-federal match) to launch feasibility work.

A certain amount of organizational development would be necessary to prepare for a grant application, and it would be necessary to find a willing state agency partner to be the project proponent (necessary for the FLAP application process). ODOT is unlikely to serve in this role, and Oregon Travel Information Council may also be disinclined. It is possible that Oregon Solutions could support an early effort to apply for the FLAP grant and provide a level of initial project momentum to get this ball rolling.

7. RECOMMENDATION

The infrastructure and governance issues at Mount Hood are complex. While the current rest area infrastructure has served the area well, it is now decades old, in poor condition, functionally obsolete, and won't meet the travel, work, environmental, and recreational demands for the twenty-first century. The diverse array of ownership, management, and stakeholder interest—public and private—also creates leadership challenges that would benefit from support.

Because of this, we find this situation would benefit from a collaborative effort, and we recommend this proposed project receive designation as an Oregon Solutions project. Our findings indicate that overlapping authorities require coordination and alignment and that a collaborative process would bring stakeholders and resources together that would help lead to a workable solution. In addition, a collaborative process can create a vehicle for building shared leadership, allowing all parties to participate without having the sole responsibility placed on a single entity. A governor's designation would be an important signal to public agencies of the importance of this project and the need to hold it as a priority. Finally, it could provide an initial mechanism for application for a FLAP grant.

Oregon Solutions recommends the initial focus of collaborative engagement be on relocation of the existing rest area in a context of broader transportation needs and the completion of the FLAP grant. Because of the keystone nature of the rest area in relation to all of the transportation-related needs, and the uniform agreement of interviewees as to the importance of rest area relocation, we believe that part of the project should be primary. Success on rest area work could establish governance, momentum, and resources to address broader topics in the future.

8. PROCESS AND BUDGET

8.1. Strategy

Oregon Solutions recommends the following strategy for February through July 2021. The intent is for Oregon Solutions staff to help provide capacity to advance this work early on, but that additional and ongoing capacity would be identified and flow through project governance. We recommend that Oregon Solutions staff do the following:

- Gather the group every thirty to sixty days for the first six months to establish scope and purpose and sequencing of the Oregon Solutions process;
- Work with Western Federal Lands Highway Team to prepare and submit a FLAP feasibility grant request;
- Work with conveners and the Governor’s Office to establish a governance structure; and
- Communicate with the ODOT Vision around the Mountain process.

8.2. Proposed timeline

February–March

Convening meeting

- Welcome, introduction, purpose
- Co-convenor intent statements
- Statements of participant interest
- Clarification of Oregon Solutions and governor direction
- Discussion of process: flow, dates, roles

March–April

Governance development meeting

April–May

Development of grant proposal for feasibility study or subgroup work session

May–June

Governance development meeting

June–July

Identifying key feasibility study questions—continued work on governance

8.3. Budget Considerations

Oregon Solutions staff time required for this effort would be up to twenty-four hours per month through June 2021.

APPENDIX A: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

USDA/US Forest Service

Richard Periman, Forest Supervisor
Kristin Austin, Engineering Staff Officer

Oregon Department of Transportation

Rian Windsheimer, Region Manager, Portland Metropolitan Region
Jason Kelly, ODOT Project Coordinator for Vision Around the Mountain Planning Process

Western Federal Lands Highway Division

Pete Field, FLAP Coordinator

Oregon Travel Information Council

Jim Denno, Executive Director

Governor's Office | Regional Strategies

Raihana Ansary, Regional coordinator
Nate Stice, Regional Coordinator

Congressman Earl Blumenauer's Office

Liv Brumfield, Field Representative
Zoie Wesenberg, Field Representative

Senator Ron Wyden's Office

Malcom McGeary, Natural Resources Director
Ree Armitage, Portland Field Area Representative

Senator Jeff Merkley's Office

Dan Mahr, Regional Representative

Clackamas County

Teresa Christopherson, Administrator, Social Services Division
Karen Beurhing, Long Range Planning Manager
Emily Klepper, Senior Policy Director, Clackamas County Board of Commissioners
Joe Marek, Clackamas County Transportation Engineer

Timberline Lodge

Jeff Kohnstamm, President
Jon Tullis, Director of Public Affairs

Tribal Government

Michele Stacona, Executive Director, Warm Springs Tribe (invited)

Government Camp Citizen Participation Organization

Nick Rinard, President

Mt. Hood Museum

Lloyd Musser, Director

Mt. Hood Ski Bowl

Brett Fischer, Vice President for Planning and Development

Mike Quinn, General Manager

Mt. Hood Meadows

Matthew Drake, Chairman and Chief Operating Officer

Travel Oregon

Scott Bricker, Director of Product Development

Mt. Hood Territory

Samara Phelps, Executive Director

Oregon Trucking Association

Jana Jarvis, Executive Director

City of Sandy and Oregon Transit Association

Andi Howell, Transit Director City of Sandy and current president, Oregon Transit Association

Oregon Senator Chuck Thomsen

Hood River

Oregon Representative Anna Williams

Hood River

Mid-Columbia Economic Development

Kathy Fitzpatrick, Project/Mobility Manager

Columbia Area Transit

Patti Fink, Executive Director

Amy Schlappi, Planning and Development Manager

AAA Oregon-Idaho

Marie Dodds, Director of Government and Public Affairs

Friends of Timberline

Brent Dahl, Executive Director

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Have you been involved in any previous effort to discuss and/or improve the parking/rest area at Government Camp? Explain: what/ when/ why/ how/ where/ with whom.
2. What are your primary interests, needs, or goals specific to infrastructure up at Government Camp?

[For those who have worked on plans related to Government Camp Infrastructure]
From your (professional) knowledge, what planning process related to Government Camp's infrastructure should we be aware of as we do our work?

3. Given what you've said already and not taking into account any legal or bureaucratic limitations, what do you see as the most important logical starting point in order to improve infrastructure at the Government Camp area?
4. From your perspective, what are the most important priorities and/or project goals should this become an Oregon Solutions project?
5. What do you think this project needs in order to be successful? Who / what might be able to meet those needs?
6. What are the challenges or barriers (critical issues) that need to be addressed to resolve these topics?
7. Are any of these unattainable because of differing views? What is the potential for resolution? Are there differences regarding technical data or policy? Do you have suggestions for how they might be overcome?
8. What are the authorities or approvals that you know of that need to occur for this project to succeed?
9. Who do you think should sit at the project team table—public, private, key stakeholders? (Ask interviewee to consider social justice, diversity, and equity issues, and share with interviewee your list of others being interviewed.)
10. What are your key interests in this process? How do you see participation in this process as helping your interests?
11. What would happen if an Oregon Solutions process were not convened?

12. Who do you think would be a good convener(s) for this project?

13. Do you have any questions for us? Is there anything else you want to address that wasn't addressed already?