

I-84 Corridor Strategy



Public Involvement and
Community Outreach
Summary Report
March 2005



Introduction

The purpose of the I-84 Corridor Strategy project is to develop a long-term vision and design guidelines for the interstate corridor in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). The I-84 Corridor Strategy will guide design, construction, and management activities in the corridor.

Currently there are no specific guidelines for improvements or modifications to features along the I-84 corridor. The lack of a clear, cohesive framework for the corridor has made it difficult to implement needed improvements in an efficient manner. The I-84 Corridor Strategy will provide the framework to help the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) manage and improve the interstate in a manner that meets public safety and transportation needs while also meeting CRGNSA provisions. The I-84 Corridor Strategy will help provide continuity of design for corridor features in the CRGNSA and efficient implementation of needed transportation projects. The I-84 Corridor Strategy is scheduled to be completed by fall 2005.

This project is being guided by representatives from the Oregon Department of Transportation, Columbia River Gorge Commission, USDA Forest Service, Federal Highway Administration, and counties in the CRGNSA.

The I-84 Corridor Strategy is being shaped by a broad-based and intensive public outreach effort. Ideas and suggestions gathered from agencies, stakeholder groups, and the public-at-large are being considered and integrated into the development of the vision, goals, objectives, and design guidelines for the I-84 corridor. The purpose of the outreach process is to involve a broad spectrum of interests and perspectives in the development of the I-84 Corridor Strategy. Broad-based involvement will help to ensure project success by building broad-based interest and support in the strategy. Meaningful public involvement and community outreach also will help to ensure that the I-84 Corridor Strategy can be successfully implemented over the long-term.

Public involvement and community outreach began at the outset of the I-84 Corridor Strategy project and will continue through project completion. A project schedule that highlights past and future outreach activities is provided on page 10.

The following report is a summary of methods used and information gathered during the initial phase of the public outreach effort for the I-84 Corridor Strategy project. The report describes the process of developing the public outreach effort, explains the exercises and activities used, summarizes public input gathered, and discusses next steps in the public outreach effort.



Appendices A, B, C, and D contain comments received during Workshop Series #1, the open house sessions, and through the various other outreach methods described in this report.

Public Outreach Process

The first stage of outreach involved a two-week-long interactive workshop series, from January 10-21, 2005. Nearly 400 people participated in workshop sessions and public meetings. Focus-group workshops were held each day, and took place in Salem, Troutdale, Hood River, and The Dalles. The workshops were designed specifically to meet with stakeholder groups of varying interests. Evening public meetings were held in Troutdale, Corbett, Cascade Locks, Hood River, and The Dalles. Open house meetings were held in Troutdale, Hood River, and The Dalles on February 1, 2, and 3, 2005. The purpose of these open houses was to present the public with a summary of input received during the workshops. Comments received during the open houses are provided in Appendix C. A schedule providing information about meeting times, locations and attending organizations can be found at the end of this report.

Identifying Stakeholders

Stakeholders were first identified by the I-84 Corridor Strategy Level 1 Team (a project steering committee). Beginning in November 2004, Level 1 team members began identifying key stakeholders to participate in Workshop Series #1. In all, over 350 stakeholders were identified.

After all the stakeholders were identified, they were grouped into “like-interests” and invited to participate in daytime focus-group workshops based on their geographical location. Stakeholder groups included:

- Business and Tourism
- City and County Governments
- Design Interests
- Environmental Organizations
- Federal and State Government
- Historical Interests
- Landowners Adjacent to the Right-of-Way
- Oregon Department of Transportation Representatives
- Recreational Interests
- Utility and Emergency Services
- Others

Stakeholder representatives were contacted by phone and email during December and the meeting schedule was finalized in early January 2005. A representative from each stakeholder group was contacted and given a brief introduction to the project, invited to attend a workshop with other organizations of “like-interest,” and welcomed

to invite up to five people from his/her organization. Representatives from agencies/organizations who were unable to attend daytime sessions, were invited to attend one of the evening meetings. Each stakeholder was mailed a Project Description Sheet.

Notifying the Public

The general public was given advance notification for the evening public meetings. Press releases were issued, and several newspaper articles were written about the project. Notices for all public evening meetings, including contact information, were listed in 12 newspapers throughout the Columbia River Gorge, as well as on the ODOT website. Several of the stakeholders also sent emails to members of their groups inviting them to attend the evening meetings. Project Description Sheets and meeting announcement flyers were distributed throughout each of the communities as well. Mailing cards were sent to thousands of residents and business owners in the project vicinity. Meetings were also announced on various websites.

These notification methods were very effective in informing the public about the project and meetings. Following are descriptions of the outreach methods being used as part of the I-84 Corridor Strategy Project.

Outreach Methods

Throughout the entire project process, several outreach tools are being used to inform the public about the I-84 Corridor Strategy project, as well as to notify them about meetings and open houses. Below is a list of ongoing outreach methods for the I-84 Corridor Strategy.

Project Description Sheet Updates

The one-page, double-sided, color informational piece that includes a project description, schedule of project, meeting announcements, and contact information will be updated throughout the course of the project.

ODOT Website

Meeting announcements and information about the project are posted on ODOT's website, providing access to a broad audience.

Newspapers

ODOT is coordinating with newspapers throughout the region. Meeting announcements, project background, and project team contact information will continue to be placed in newspapers throughout the Columbia River Gorge. Press releases will be issued at key points during the project.

Interactive Workshops with Stakeholder Groups

Stakeholder groups will continue to be invited to attend small, interactive workshop sessions. In Workshop Series #1, stakeholders





were grouped with “like-interests” to facilitate non-confrontational and open discussions. In Workshop Series #2, stakeholder groups with a variety of interests will be grouped together so that participants can gain insights into the perspectives, concerns, and ideas of others.

General Public Workshops

Evening meetings will continue to be held for the general public and stakeholders not able to attend day meetings. The typical format will involve a brief presentation and activities to prompt participation. Participants will be given ample opportunity to provide comments and ideas.

Open Houses

Open houses will be held to allow the public to view presentation boards with draft information and provide additional feedback and comments. Team members will be available to talk to participants one-on-one and answer questions, as needed.

Tribal Outreach

Members of the project team will be visiting tribes who have interests in the Columbia River Gorge area to give presentations about the project and gather comments and input.

Project Email and Phone Number

An email address and phone number have been set-up specifically for this project. The email address is i84strategy@otak.com. The phone number is a toll free phone number: 1 (866) 944-6743. Both were widely distributed before and during the January workshops. The majority of the emails received to date have come from people very interested in bicycling in the Gorge. Email comments are provided in Appendix D to this report. The email address and phone number will remain active throughout the duration of the project.

Comment Cards

Comment cards were distributed at all meetings to allow participants to give additional input. The project team encouraged participants to fill out comment cards at the meetings. An address was listed on the back so participants could also mail the card. The project email address and phone number were also listed on the comment card. Comments received to date are included in Appendix D to this report.

Letters of Comment

After the January workshop series, several letters were submitted to the project team. Comments from letters received to date can be found in Appendix D of this report.

Follow-up Meetings and Phone Calls

Identified stakeholders unable to attend workshops or public meetings may be contacted to gather their ideas and comments on aspects of the project.

Workshop Series #1 Meeting Snapshot

The goal of the Workshop Series #1 meetings was to create an open environment where participants could share their opinions and ideas on development of the overall vision and design guidelines for the I-84 corridor.

Each 90-minute meeting began with a project presentation providing project background and an overview of some of the corridor features that are being addressed during this project.

Participants were then given the opportunity to provide feedback through an interactive visual preference exercise. This was followed by a brainstorming activity that involved participants in envisioning the future of I-84. These exercises are discussed in greater detail later in this section. Each meeting ended with a question and answer period.

Visual Preference Exercise

In the visual preference exercise, individuals began exploring various types of corridor features and expressing likes and dislikes regarding those features.

Participants were presented with 21 presentation boards showing photos of various types of corridor features, such as bridges, guardrails, rock fall mitigation, and various other elements. Photos depicted features found along I-84 and the Historic Columbia River Highway, as well as examples of interstate and highway features found around the country. The intent was to give participants a wide range of options to provide feedback on.

Each person was given 12 red dot stickers and 12 green dot stickers and then asked to place the green dots on the photos of features they liked and the red dots on the features they did not like.

Hundreds of people participated in the visual preference exercise. Images representing the cumulative input from meeting participants are provided in Appendix A.

Many people expressed visual preferences for the use of natural materials (rock, stone facing, vegetation, etc.) in the corridor. People also expressed a preference for historic features and arch forms.



The above images were just some of the many that received green dots (indicating people liked them) during Workshop Series #1.



Visioning Exercise

The visioning exercise was designed to lead participants through a brainstorming session where they could imagine a preferred future for the I-84 corridor through the Gorge National Scenic Area. This exercise was done at each daytime focus-group workshop and evening public meeting. Each group was assured there were no wrong answers and then presented with the following scenario:

“After completion of the highly successful I-84 Corridor Strategy process, you get the offer of a lifetime: to move away to a beautiful tropical island. You leave the Pacific Northwest and vow to return one day.

Many, many years later, you return to the Columbia Gorge. The Corridor Strategy has been implemented and has been a great success. As you travel through the Gorge, you really like what you see. What do you see?”

Participants were asked to take a few minutes to consider the question before the 15 minute brainstorming session began. Each idea that was shared was written down on flip chart boards. Comments and ideas shared during the visioning exercises can be found in Appendix B.

Common Themes

The results of the visual preference exercises and visioning exercises were pulled together and analyzed. The most frequently expressed ideas during the focus-group workshops and public meetings of Workshop Series # 1 are summarized below.

Most Frequently Stated Words and Phrases

A word-search was performed on the comments received from the public during Workshop Series #1 to find the most frequently occurring words and phrases. This provided a quick overview of topics and ideas most often mentioned during the workshops and public meetings. The results of the word search are provided in the following table.

Most Frequently Stated Words and Phrases

Words/Phrases	# of Times Used
River	188
Access / Interchange(s)	153
View / Viewpoint / Viewshed	152
Sign / Signage	142
History / Historic / Historical	109
Color / Blend / Blending	99
Nature / Natural	93
Bridge(s)	90
Tree(s) / Cottonwood(s)	85
Stone / Rock	78
Safe / Safety / Safer	73
Barrier(s)	67
Rest Area(s) / Restroom(s) / Rest Stop(s) / Comfort Station(s)	67
Bike / Bicycle / Cyclist	65
Remove / Cut / Trim	64
Overpass / Underpass / Passage	62
Vegetation / Vegetation Management	61
Wildlife	59
Falls	53
Traffic	49
Ice / De-icing	49
Truck(s)	47
Maintain / Maintenance	44
Scenic / Scenery	42
Multnomah Falls / Multnomah Interchange	42
Guardrail(s) / Railing(s)	41
Path / Trail	37
Fish / Fish Passage	33
Native / Native Species	32
Retain / Preserve / Protect	29
Continuous / Continual / Continuity	28



Common Messages and Themes

After developing a list of frequent words and phrases, information gathered during Workshop Series #1 was further analyzed to find general messages and themes that were most commonly expressed by workshop attendees. Common messages and themes were then grouped under three categories.

Management and Access Considerations

- Roadway signs need to be minimized, more effective, and have a unified design.
- Provide safe and accessible bicycle and pedestrian facilities along the entire corridor:
 - Historic Columbia River Highway & HCRH State Trail, and
 - multi-use trail with access to the water.
- Need more access points to the river.
- Need more viewpoints/rest areas with historical and natural interpretation.
- Commuter trains or buses should be provided for:
 - accommodating future traffic growth, and
 - historic/tourism opportunities.
- Minimize conflicts between trucks and other traffic.
- No more lanes should be added.

Preservation and Design Considerations

- Provide and enhance views:
 - river, waterfalls, and Bridge of the Gods,
 - consider see-through guardrails and side barriers, and
 - diminish the visual impact of fences, power lines, railroad.
- The highway and features should blend with the natural landscape:
 - use natural materials (rock), and
 - emphasize the landscape more than structures.
- Smooth transitions, lines, and arches are preferred.
- Wildlife protection:
 - provide for safe wildlife crossings, and
 - culverts/bridges need to provide passage for fish.
- Remove non-native species and support growth of native vegetation.

Safety Considerations

- Improve striping and safety markings for bad weather and nighttime driving.
- Improve and increase pull off areas:
 - consistent shoulders for emergency pull off,
 - rest stops, and
 - places to stop & enjoy scenery.

- Truck spray and surface drainage are major safety concerns.
- Re-design and simplify interchanges:
 - Cascade Locks
 - Multnomah Falls
 - Hood River
 - Troutdale

Diverse Perspectives

The range of diverse perspectives shared by workshop participants underscores the need for creative solutions. Following is a summary of the diverse perspectives heard most often during Workshop Series #1.

- Cut/remove trees to open views or keep them to absorb noise, protect from riverbank and slope erosion, and shade marine habitat?
- One design for the entire Gorge or design treatments that vary by location?
 - East vs. West
 - Urban vs. Rural
- Should I-84 emulate the Historic Columbia River Highway or have its own identity?
- Should lighting be increased or be significantly decreased?
- What can be done to provide views and accommodate safety? (Median and side barriers block views, but also shield headlight glare and control vehicles)



Upcoming Outreach Activities

Additional outreach activities are planned for late spring, summer and fall, and will take place at multiple locations throughout the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

A second public meeting series is scheduled for May 2005. This meeting series will include presentation of draft vision statement, goals, and objectives for the I-84 Corridor Strategy. The public will have the opportunity to share ideas to help develop design concepts for corridor features. Press releases and meeting announcements will be distributed in several local newspapers in advance of this workshop series to inform the public about the meetings.

A third public meeting series is scheduled for summer and fall of 2005. This two-part meeting series will include presentation materials unveiling draft design guidelines for the I-84 Corridor Strategy, reflecting public input gathered through previous public outreach activities. The public will have the opportunity to comment and provide additional feedback on the draft design guidelines.

Project Steps & Schedule

	2004			2005											
	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Project Kick-Off	■														
Discovery Stage: Initial Research and Existing Conditions Analysis	■														
1st Public Meeting Series				◆											
Develop Preliminary Design Ideas and Concepts					■										
2nd Public Meeting Series							◆								
Develop Draft I-84 Corridor Strategy - Vision and Design Guidelines							■								
3rd Public Meeting Series									◆				◆		
Finalize I-84 Corridor Strategy - Vision and Design Guidelines														■	

Context Sensitive and Sustainable Solutions (CS³)

The I-84 Corridor Strategy is being completed in accordance with ODOT's CS³ Program. CS³ solutions reflect community values and diversity; preserve cultural, aesthetic, and historic resources; maintain safety and mobility; support economic prosperity; achieve responsible stewardship of the natural environment; and ensure cost effective implementation.



Week One

Jan 10

Focus-Group Sessions

- 8:30-10:00am
ODOT Groups
- 10:30am-12:00pm
ODOT Groups
- 1:30-3:00pm
ODOT Groups
- 3:30-5:00pm
DOT Gropus

Public Meeting

- 6:30-8:30pm Troutdale
The Edgefield

Jan 11

Focus-Group Sessions

- 8:30-10:00am
ODOT Groups
- 10:30am-12:00pm
ODOT Groups
- 1:30-3:00pm
ODOT Groups
- 3:30-5:00pm
ODOT Groups

Public Meeting

- 6:30-8:30pm Corbett
Corbett Grade School

Jan 12

Focus-Group Sessions

- 8:30-10:00am **Business & Tourism**
West Columbia Gorge Chamber of Commerce
Columbia River Gorge Visitor's Assoc.
- 10:30am-12:00pm **Recreation**
Oregon Equestrian Trails
Skamania County
Oregon Fire & Rescue
Multnomah County
Portland Wheelman Touring Club
- 1:30-3:00pm **Environment**
Sierra Club
Friends of the Columbia River Gorge
- 3:30-5:00pm **Design**
ASLA
Columbia Gorge Institute

Public Meeting

- 6:30-8:30pm Cascade Locks
Charburger

Jan 13

Focus-Group Sessions

- 8:30-10:00am **Business & Tourism**
Mt. Hood Railroad
Gorge Publishing, Inc.
Hood River County Chamber of Commerce
- 10:30am-12:00pm **Recreation**
US Fish & Wildlife Service
Hood River County
USDA Forest Service - CRG NSA
- 1:30-3:00pm **Landowners**
- 3:30-5:00pm **Environment**
Friends of the Columbia River Gorge
Columbia Gorge Widnsurfing Assoc.

Jan 14

Focus-Group Sessions

- 8:30-10:00am **County Government**
Klickitat County
Wasco County
Multnomah County
Hood River County
- 10:30am-12:00pm **City Government**
City of Hood River
Port of Hood River
Union Pacific Railroad
- 1:30-3:00pm **Historic Resources**
Crown Point Historical Society
Historic Columbia River Highway Advisory Committee
Oregon Historic Trails Advisory Committee
Hood River County Historical Society
Oregon-California Trails Association
Oregon State Historic Preservation Office
- 3:30-5:00pm **Utilities, Facilities, Special Services**
Pacific Power
City of Cascade Locks City Light

Week Two

Jan 18

Public Meeting

- 6:30-8:30pm Hood River
The Hood River Inn

Jan 19

Focus-Group Sessions

- 1:30-3:00pm **Miscellaenous**
Mid-Columbia Fire Rescue
NOAA Fisheries

Public Meeting

- 6:30-8:30pm The Dalles
The Discovery Center

Jan 20

Focus-Group Sessions

- 10:30am-12:00pm **Utilities, Facilities, Special Services**
Wasco Co. Emergency Services
US Army Corps of Engineers
Wasco Co. Sheriff's Office
Mid-Columbia Medical Center
Oregon State Patrol
- 12:00pm **Cascade Locks Action Team**
- 3:30-5:00pm **City Government**
City of The Dalles
Port of The Dalles
- 7:00pm **Port of Cascade Locks**

Note: Other groups and organizations may have participated in workshops. Not all attendees signed in.