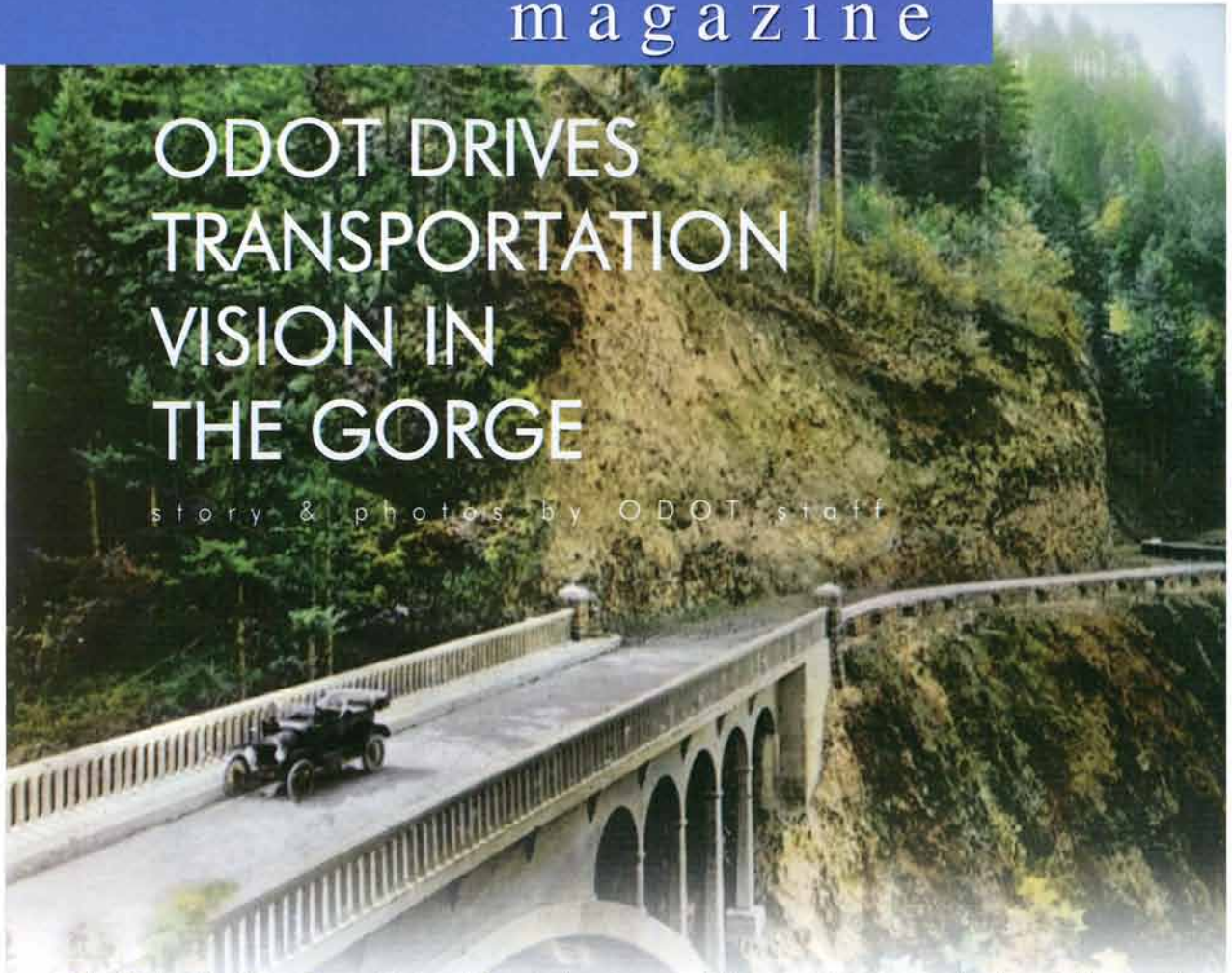


COLUMBIA GORGE

magazine

ODOT DRIVES TRANSPORTATION VISION IN THE GORGE

story & photos by ODOT staff



The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is one of the most visually spectacular and frequently visited areas in the nation, hosting more than 2 million visitors each year. Construction and maintenance of transportation-related Gorge facilities—roadways, bridges, rest stops, and others—is one of the Oregon Department of Transportation's top priorities.

When the trail along the Oregon side of the Columbia River Gorge was paved early in the 20th century, it became the Columbia River Highway. The first major paved road in the region, the highway featured bridges 18-feet wide, with handsome stone facades and graceful arches. The route provided greater access for commerce and pleasure but allowed no room for expansion, because it hugged the rugged, winding cliffs that make up the south side of the Gorge.

As the need for wider and more efficient highways increased in the late 1930s, contractors and Oregon Highway Department crews built Interstate 84 at water level with funding from the federal government. Twenty-six bridges cross the formidable geographic obstacles in the Gorge and create a seamless corridor for recreation and commerce.

Now, a new generation of bridges is being built, repairing or replacing all 26 structures on I-84. Modern construction techniques will bring greater safety, and new bridge designs will be reminiscent of their elegant predecessors on the Historic Columbia River Highway.

In 2003, the Oregon Legislature enacted OTIA III, the third Oregon Transportation Investment Act, which allocated \$1.3 billion dollars to repair or replace the majority of the bridges along Oregon's interstate system - about 365 bridges in all. ODOT is conducting the

Unlocking the Cascades

Bundle 209: Dodson - Tanner Creek

Contract value: \$17.4 million

Construction let date: December 2007

Anticipated construction start date: January 2008

Anticipated construction end date: 2010

To Portland

Cascade Locks

COLUMBIA GORGE

magazine

bridge work through its OTIA III State Bridge Delivery Program. The considerable scope of work makes the program Oregon's largest transportation project in over 50 years.

To achieve successful delivery, ODOT contracted with Oregon Bridge Delivery Partners—a private-sector joint venture of HDR Engineering and Fluor Enterprises—to help manage the \$1.3 billion dollar bridge program. OBDP, in turn, contracted with local engineering firms to undertake the different design and construction aspects of the many projects.

Never has the construction design element been more important than in the Columbia River Gorge area. In the past, no clear, cohesive framework existed to guide roadway improvements in the corridor; Gorge facilities were simply designed project by project. With the Gorge's complex regulatory requirements and special interests, this approach has sometimes been costly, time-consuming and inefficient.

Change is coming. Working with a team of public involvement professionals, ODOT has led development of the I-84 Corridor Strategy that will guide future transportation projects within the Gorge.

The corridor strategy provides a vision that includes long-term goals and objectives for transportation projects throughout the corridor. Specifically, design guidelines, including conceptual diagrams and recommendations for line, color, and texture of transportation project features and materials, and a collaborative, interdisciplinary, interagency approach to project planning and development.

A GLIMPSE OF THE I-84 PROJECT

The I-84 Corridor Strategy, completed in November 2005, will provide the framework to help ODOT manage and improve transportation facilities throughout the corridor in a manner that meets public safety and transportation needs, while also meeting National Scenic Area regulatory requirements and making the best use of Oregonians' transportation dollars.

The strategy will also help provide visual continuity of built features in the Gorge, enhancing the Gorge experience for residents and travelers alike. It includes design guidelines for roadways and bridges, with design elements ranging from abutments and railings to landscaping and wildlife crossings. The overall model for construction has been the Columbia River Highway, with its arched bridges reflecting the basalt rock features in the Gorge. The planned architecture along the corridor will compliment—not rival or distract from—the integrity of the aging highway.

Representatives of state and federal agencies, adjacent counties, and the private companies consulting on the bridge program have worked together to develop these design guidelines. These groups—known as the Gorge Committee Level 1 Team—collaborated on design guidelines with local citizens, who participated in a series of public meetings throughout 2005.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

With the I-84 Corridor Strategy in place, ODOT has instituted standards and guidelines that smooth the regulatory approval process, ensure that designs preserve or enhance community livability, remain consistent with economic development goals, and are implemented in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible fashion.

"We will be able to engage the public in a different way that meets their needs, and enables us to deliver the right projects, in the right time, in the right way," said Matt Garrett, ODOT director.

Early design concepts were presented last fall at workshops in several Gorge communities. A draft of the I-84 Corridor Strategy document was made available to the public and was then revised based on public input, and a final document was completed in late November 2005.



The strategy will also help provide visual continuity of built features in the Gorge, enhancing the Gorge experience for residents and travelers alike. It includes design guidelines for roadways and bridges, with design elements ranging from abutments and railings to landscaping and wildlife crossings.

COLUMBIA GORGE

magazine

An architecture firm specializing in transportation, growth management and urban design, Otak, was hired to coordinate and facilitate the public meetings. "The public involvement process on these bridges has been unique," said Kay VanSickle, director of transportation for Otak. "I expect increased interest from other states as the program continues to gain publicity."

The numerous projects have been split into four separate bundles, allowing smaller, Oregon-based companies a chance to bid for the contracts. The first bundle includes the four bridges on I-84 just east of Troutdale that form the gateway to the Gorge, which are scheduled to be replaced. The second bundle includes five bridges scheduled for repair or replacement near Cascade Locks. The third bundle, at the junction of the Hood and Columbia Rivers, has 12 highway bridges scheduled for construction to facilitate both commerce and recreation. Finally, the fourth bundle, near The Dalles Dam, includes the repair or replacement of five bridges.

Brian Litt, a senior planner with the Gorge Commission who worked on the I-84 Corridor Strategy, knows how difficult it can be to build transportation facilities without clear guidelines. "The I-84 project will eliminate a lot of challenges we have been struggling with over the years," said Litt. "I am very impressed with the progress we are making under ODOT's leadership."

All four bundles in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area will enter the design phase this spring, with construction starting in 2007. The contractors-Parsons Brinckerhoff, David Evans and Associates, and URS Corp.-will follow the I-84 Corridor Strategy design guidelines, and create bridges that will continue to uphold the beauty of the Columbia Gorge for years to come.



With the I-84 Corridor Strategy in place, ODOT has instituted standards and guidelines that smooth the regulatory approval process, ensure that designs preserve or enhance community livability, remain consistent with economic development goals, and are implemented in a cost-effective and environmentally responsible fashion.