

CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE AND NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION

1.1 Project Identification

Project Name: US 26: Wildwood-Wemme
County: Clackamas
Highway: US 26, Mt. Hood Highway
Oregon Department of Transportation, Region 1
Key Number: 12840
Estimated cost: \$5,963,000.00



1.2 Introduction

Where is the proposed project located?

The proposed 1.26-mile Wildwood-Wemme Project is located on the Mt. Hood Highway No. 26 (US 26) between mile posts (MP) 38.75 to 40.01, between the communities of Wildwood at the west, and Wemme at the east. The western beginning point is at Camino Rio Drive at Mt. Hood Village and the eastern boundary is at E. Arrah Wanna Boulevard. The Portland metropolitan area is located about 45 miles to the west; to the east is Mt. Hood and central Oregon. Figure 1-1, Project Vicinity Map shows the location of the proposed project, Figure 1-2 shows the project limits.

US 26 is a major east-west statewide highway route connecting western Oregon with central and eastern Oregon. US 26 is the primary and most direct vehicle route between Portland and popular mountain recreation areas (skiing and hiking) on Mt. Hood and in central Oregon. It is a heavily traveled tourist route throughout the year, and a designated freight route.

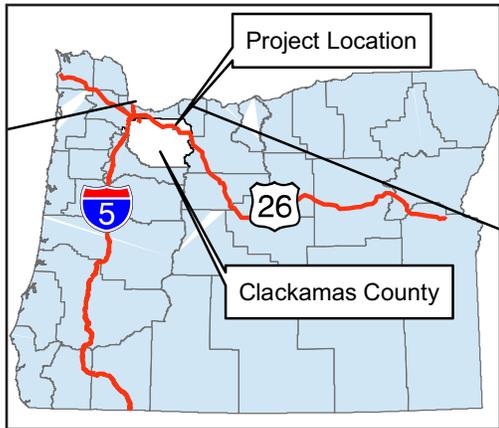
What is the history of the proposed project?

In 1986 the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) prepared the Wildwood to Rhododendron Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Record of Decision. The EIS evaluated various alternatives

to improve Highway 26. The improvements called for widening the highway between Wildwood and Rhododendron to five lanes including a continuous center left turn lane. The segment between MP 38.75 and 40.01 was subsequently narrowed to 4 lanes, eliminating the 14 foot center turn lane, to reduce the number of large trees in the A.J. Dwyer Memorial Scenic Area (Dwyer Area) that would have been removed. The 0.27-mile segment within the Dwyer Area (the middle segment of the proposed Wildwood-Wemme project) contains the largest trees.

After the widening project was completed in about 1990, a significant number of accidents occurred in the segment without the center turn lane, many related to not having a center turn lane refuge for left turns. In 1998 citizens in the area petitioned ODOT to improve safety on US 26 in the Wildwood to Wemme area. This project responds to the citizen request to address safety issues in the area. Appendix A contains a copy of the petition.

"I (We) Request that the Oregon Department of Transportation provide safe turning provisions (i.e. Turning Lane) on Highway 26 between E. Wemme Trail (MP 38.8) and E. Arrah Wanna (MP 40). This request is based on our great concern for the safety of those entering and exiting Highway 26 in this area." --- From citizen petition, December 14, 1998



Regional Vicinity

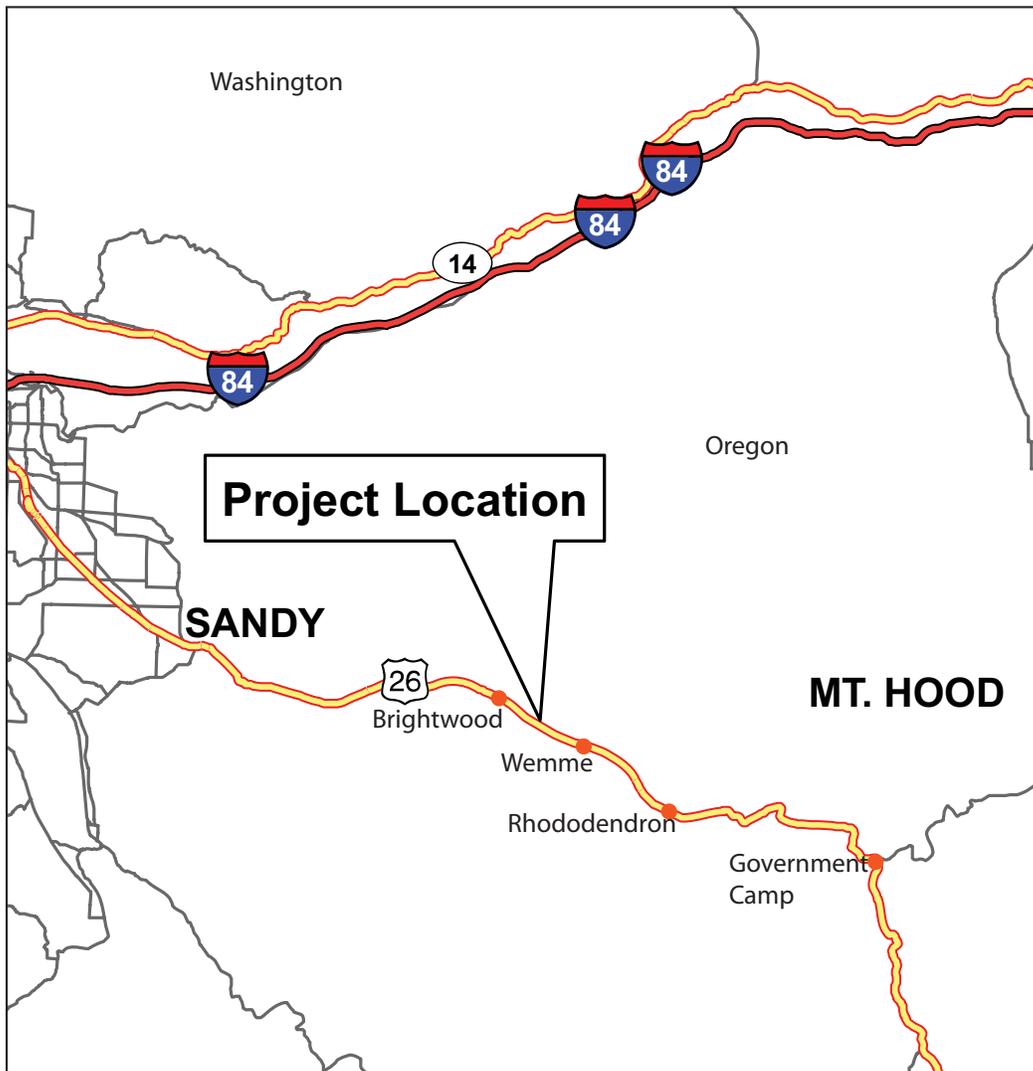


Figure 1-1 Project Vicinity Map

Local Vicinity



Figure 1-2 Project Limits

1.3 Purpose

What is the purpose of the project?

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve safety on US 26 between milepost 38.75 and milepost 40.01 and to match the cross section (width of lanes, center turn lane and shoulders) to that of the roadway to the east and west of the proposed project area.

1.4 Need

Why is the project needed?

Safety improvements are needed because approximately 40 driveways and streets access US 26 in this 1.26-mile section, creating a safety hazard for vehicles making left turns onto and from the highway. Motorists making left turns from the highway are frequently required to stop in the fast lane to wait for a gap in oncoming traffic while those turning left onto the highway have no median refuge to enter. The posted speed in the project area is 45 miles per hour, however the average speed through the area is closer to 55 miles per hour.

The current average daily traffic (ADT) measured in 2004 within the project limits is 12,100. In 2030 the ADT is projected to increase to 21,000.

Thirteen accidents were reported within the project limits in the 5-year period from 2000 through 2004 shown in Table 1-1.

The computed accident rate for the project section over the five-year study period is 0.47 accidents per million vehicle miles traveled. This accident rate is lower than the 2004 statewide average accident rate of 0.62 accident per million vehicle miles traveled on similar rural principal arterials.



Average daily traffic (ADT) is the average number of vehicles passing a certain point each day on a highway, road or street.

Table 1-1 5-Year (2000-2004) Traffic Crash Summary US 26: Mt. Hood Highway									
Highway Section	Rear-end	Fixed-Object	Turning	Head On	SS-M	SS-O	Nonc.	Other	Total
Mile Post 38.75 to Mile Post 40.01	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	13
Legend: SS-M = Sideswipe-Meeting; SS-O = Sideswipe-Overtaking; Nonc. = Non-collision									
Crash Severity									
Fatality	Injury A (Major)	Injury B (Intermediate)	Injury C (Minor)	Property Damage Only	Total				
1	1	3	2	6	13				
Legend: Injury A – Major (bleeding, broken bones, etc.); Injury B – Intermediate (bruises, swelling, etc.); Injury C – Minor (complaints of pain)									

Table 1-1 Crash Summary History

1.5 Goals and Objectives

Besides safety, what additional goals and objectives would be considered for the project?

The goals and objectives come from the project delivery team, citizens who raised issues at recent project open house meetings, and personal conversations with residents and business owners in the project area. While improving safety is the number one goal, the following goals and objectives are also addressed in the analysis of impacts, mitigation for impacts and in the design of the project.

- Improve highway stormwater drainage and treatment
- Provide or allow for bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Minimize and mitigate visual impacts
- Avoid or minimize impacts to historic properties
- Avoid or minimize impacts to wetlands

1.6 Decision Making

Who makes the decisions about the project?

An ODOT interdisciplinary project delivery team composed of technical staff from traffic, engineering, planning and environmental fields will recommend an alternative to ODOT management and to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The project delivery team will base the recommendation on public need, impacts of the proposed project on the natural and built environment, and economics. Public comments will also be used to inform the decision. The team will consider the ability to mitigate for impacts and will consult with local, state and federal regulating agencies. The team will continue to consult with the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and rely on its participation in the process. FHWA is the approving federal agency.