



When improving highway facilities, the Department of Transportation has the task of acquiring right of way. It is the aim and desire of the Department to obtain right of way with fairness and equity.

The State is empowered to acquire private property for public use. With this power goes the obligation to protect the rights of the individual property owner. The Department thus has a dual responsibility. It is to recognize and protect the individuals who are affected by acquisition of land, as well as competent and efficient service to the public.

### ▪ **Public Hearings**

Public hearings, when required, are held during the location and design stages of a project. Such hearings provide opportunities for public participation to ensure that highway locations and designs are consistent with Federal, State and Local goals and objectives.

The corridor hearing is held after preliminary studies have been made on several possible routes. During the course of this hearing, testimony is recorded for study by Department personnel and the Transportation Commission.

Upon selection of a corridor, a detailed survey within that corridor is made and a preliminary design plan developed for presentation at a "Design Hearing".

The "Design Hearing" provides an opportunity to present testimony about the final highway design.

In an instance where a choice of corridors is not involved, such as the case of an improvement to an existing highway, a single "Combination Corridor-Design Hearing" may be held.

After all data and testimony has been studied, a final design is adopted by the Transportation Commission and the acquisition of rights of way is authorized.

### ▪ **Just Compensation**

Owners of property needed for a highway project will be offered Just Compensation for the required rights of way. Just Compensation includes the estimated value of all the land and improvements within the needed area. In addition, if only a part of a property is to be acquired, Just Compensation will also include any measurable loss in value to the remaining property due to the partial acquisition.

Just Compensation is based on the Department's valuation of the needed property and its estimation of any damages to the remaining property. Department procedures, guided by Federal Regulations, have been designed to protect both owners of properties needed for highway rights of way as well as other taxpayers. The valuation process will be conducted either by an experienced and qualified employee of the Department or by an independent fee appraiser under a contract with the Department. The value arrived at will be by comparison of similar properties in the market that have recently sold, by knowledge and consideration of costs and depreciation for any improvement(s) to be acquired, and when applicable, by the property's income potential. The final value determination will be based on this type of information from the local real estate market.

The property to be acquired is inspected by a qualified appraiser during the first part of the valuation process. With complex acquisitions involving large portions of the property, major buildings or improvements on the property, displacement of residents, and/or damages to the remaining part of the property not being acquired, property owners will be given 15 days to prepare the property, and will be given the opportunity to

accompany the appraiser during a detailed inspection of their property.

Any increase or decrease in the value of needed property brought about by public knowledge of the upcoming highway project, is disregarded in the valuation process.

The final value estimate is reviewed for completeness and accuracy, and Just Compensation is established by the Department's Review Appraiser. In addition to this estimate of Just Compensation, the Department will make an offer to purchase any remaining property determined to have no remaining economic value to the owner.

### ▪ **Acquisition Procedure**

The Right of Way Agent who calls on you has studied the Department's valuation of the needed property and can illustrate with maps and other data how the acquisition will affect your property. The Department's offer will be confirmed in writing, together with an acquisition summary statement, and an appraisal, or evaluation sheet, which provides the basis for that amount. The Agent is authorized to obtain a deed from you to purchase your property, subject to the approval of the Transportation Commission. The Agent is unable, under Department procedures governing acquisitions, to engage in "horse trading"; rather the Agent is confined to those monetary values indicated by the appraisal process.

However, the Department is ready and willing to reconsider its position in light of any new evidence of value presented by you including a documented professional appraisal.

The Department may not take any action which would coerce you into accepting its offer. Prohibited actions include advancing the time of condemnation, deferring negotiations or condemnation or

postponing the deposit of funds in court for your use.

You need not accept the State's offer or enter an agreement felt to be unfair. Owners have a minimum 40-day period to accept or reject the offer, unless an emergency has been declared. A refusal is simply a case of disagreement between the two parties on the value of the property.

In the event the parties are still unable to agree as to the compensation to be paid, or you cannot clear the title, mediation of differences between parties, conducted by an independent mediator, can be arranged by the Department in order to reach settlement prior to filing any condemnation action. Mediation is a non-binding process where all parties reach agreement.

In the event parties are still unable to agree as to compensation to be paid, or if title cannot be cleared, a condemnation action will be filed. Once condemnation is filed, a trial date will be determined. However, an owner can elect binding arbitration prior to trial, through the Court, for amounts of \$20,000 or less, and non-binding arbitration for amounts between \$20,000 and \$50,000. Arbitration is not available above \$50,000.

Discussions and mediation can, of course, continue even after a condemnation action is filed in an effort to resolve differences. The filing allows the State to proceed with the construction project.

### ▪ **Improvements**

When the Department acquires an interest in your land, it must acquire an equal interest in your house or any other improvements located on the land acquired. If buildings are required to be removed, the Department may allow the owner to retain the improvements. If you are interested, this can be discussed with the Right of Way Agent.

## ▪ Payment

If you sign a deed and any accompanying agreements, and the Transportation Commission approves it, then the transfer of title and payment may proceed. As in a private sale, you are responsible for clearing encumbrances to the title such as unpaid taxes, assessments, mortgages, outstanding leases and other liens against your property. The Right of Way Agent will assist you in clearing title. No payment can be made until a warranty deed conveying clear title to the Department has been recorded in the appropriate county records.

At the time the deed is available for recording, authorization is given to prepare a check for your property. Normally, when no cloud obscures the title, you will receive payment for your property about four weeks after you give the Department a deed to the property.

If the condemnation action has been filed, the amount established by the Department as Just Compensation will be deposited with the court for distribution in accordance with the order of the court.

You are entitled to be reimbursed for fair and reasonable costs you incur for expenses incidental to conveying your property to the Department. Such expenses could be, but are not necessarily limited to, penalty costs for prepayment of any pre-existing recorded mortgage encumbering your property, mortgage release fees, and the State's portion of real property taxes.

## ▪ Possession

You are not required to surrender possession of your property until you have been paid the agreed purchase price or an amount equal to the Department's established estimate of just compensation has been deposited with the court for your benefit.

When negotiations begin, you, as well as any tenants occupying your property, will be notified in writing that it is the Department's intent to acquire the property. You will not be required to move from your home, farm, or business location earlier than 90 days following that notice or within 30 days after payment, whichever is later. However, if the purchase does not require you to move, the agreement to purchase your property may require you to surrender possession of your property upon payment.

The Department is aware of the need for a reasonable time for relocation. If your property is not needed for several months, your continued occupancy may be permitted on a short-term basis. The amount of rent the Department may charge you, or another tenant, may not exceed the fair rental value of the property to a short-term occupant.

## ▪ Right of Way Offices

For your convenience the Department maintains Regional Right of Way Offices in the following locations:

### Region 1 – Portland

123 NW Flanders  
Portland, OR 97209  
Voice: 503-731-8400  
Fax: 503-731-8458  
Toll Free: 888-769-7341

### Region 2 – Salem

455 Airport Road SE Bldg. A  
Salem, OR 97301-5397  
Voice: 503-986-2601  
Fax: 503-986-2622  
Toll Free: 888-769-7342

### Region 3 – Roseburg

3500 Stewart Parkway Suite 164  
Roseburg, OR 97470  
Voice: 541-957-3559  
Fax: 541-957-3563  
Toll Free: 888-769-7343

### Region 4 – Bend

63085 N Highway 97 Suite 102  
Bend, OR 97701-9901  
Voice: 541-388-6196  
Fax: 541-388-6381  
Toll Free: 888-769-7344

### Region 5 – LaGrande

3012 Island Avenue  
LaGrande, OR 97850  
Voice: 541-963-7552  
Fax: 541-962-9819  
Toll Free: 877-851-9097



**Oregon Department of Transportation**

# Acquiring Land for Highways & Public Projects

A description of the  
Department of Transportation  
Land Acquisition Program