Improving transit access to and from the Gorge

The beauty of the Columbia River Gorge attracts thousands of visitors each day. During the summer months, parking is often at or over capacity and access to picture-perfect sites such as Multnomah Falls can be challenging. As the Historic Columbia River Highway celebrates its 100th anniversary, local communities, public agencies and land managers are looking for ways to combat congestion and provide transportation options.

Today, there are few public transit choices in the Gorge, and none that connect recreational and tourist attractions such as Multnomah Falls with population centers. Enhanced transit options are a part of any solution to address congestion in the Columbia River Gorge. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) concluded the Columbia River Gorge Transit Study in March 2016 and identified immediate and near-term transit solutions for both residents and visitors.

Collecting feedback

The project team gathered input and information about travel needs and experiences in the Gorge to identify possible transit opportunities. Information was collected from fall 2015 to spring 2016 through:

• A review of existing Gorge transit and transportation options
• Small group discussions with 40 Gorge stakeholders, including recreation and tourism experts, interest groups, local government and planning officials, and transit providers
• An online public survey that garnered more than 1,700 responses
• A public open house in March 2016 organized as part of Oregon Solutions’ Historic Columbia River Highway Collaborative Project

PILOT SERVICE BEGINS THIS SUMMER

As a result of the study, ODOT and project partners are launching a pilot transit service during summer months in 2016 and 2017. Visitors to the Gorge can take the Columbia Gorge Express on weekends from the Gateway Transit Center in Portland to Multnomah Falls May through September. In addition, regular weekend bus service will transport visitors for free between an overflow parking lot at Rooster Rock State Park and Multnomah Falls. See inside for more information about the pilot service.

GOALS OF THE GORGE TRANSIT STUDY

• Improve transit access and options to recreational destinations in the Columbia River Gorge and between East Multnomah County and The Dalles
• Enhance Gorge mobility and safety
• Address congestion and limited parking capacity at Multnomah Falls
• Protect natural and cultural resources by reducing illegal parking and congestion

www.GorgeTransitStudy.org
Columbia River Gorge Transit Study

Pilot service
(starts May 27, 2016)
The Columbia Gorge Express will:
• Provide a relaxing and enjoyable ride to Multnomah Falls and Rooster Rock State Park.
• Give visitors an affordable, convenient option for accessing the Gorge.
• Help relieve parking and traffic congestion at Multnomah Falls. Free parking is available at the Gateway Transit Center and Rooster Rock State Park.

Days of operation:
Friday, Saturday and Sunday (plus federal holidays) from May 27 to the end of September
For more information, visit www.ColumbiaGorgeExpress.com.

Near-term service
(proposed to begin in 2018, funding dependent)
As the pilot progresses, ODOT and project partners will evaluate the service on an ongoing basis and continue to explore options for expansion beyond 2017. Near-term service expansion could include increasing the frequency of the existing intercity transit service between Gateway Transit Center and Hood River traveling along I-84 with stops at key destinations. Public transportation service is currently provided two days a week by Hood River County Transportation District.

Days and hours of operation:
The service design could include a limited number of longer trips per day to Hood River in conjunction with more frequent, short-line services to Multnomah Falls from Gateway Transit Center. ODOT will work with project partners and the community to determine days and hours of operation and frequency.

Lessons from the Gorge Transit Study

CURRENT ISSUES
• Visitor satisfaction is being negatively impacted by decreased parking availability and greater traffic congestion.
• Congestion issues are most acute at Multnomah Falls and along the Historic Columbia River Highway.

DEMAND FOR TRANSIT OPTIONS
• Over 70 percent of survey respondents (both visitors and residents) would consider using public transit or parking shuttles to reach Gorge area destinations.
• Most visitors travel in groups of two, indicating that small groups may be the target market for transit services.
• Visitors generally take trips to multiple destinations over several hours, and transit service would need to support this travel pattern to be viable.
• Existing transit services around the region could be leveraged to support future Gorge transit demand.

KEY DESTINATIONS
• Multnomah Falls is the top destination for visitors in the Gorge.
• Gateway Transit Center is the preferred location for connecting Gorge transit routes with existing Portland area transit.
• Hood River is a key destination for transit in the Gorge, and also can be used as a transfer point for further travel.
Other projects in the Columbia River Gorge

There are several related projects and events occurring simultaneously in 2016. Interested members of the public are encouraged to learn about these projects and get involved:

OREGON SOLUTIONS: HISTORIC COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY COLLABORATIVE (FALL 2015 – JUNE 2016)
At Governor Kate Brown’s request, this project will address short-term safety and congestion along the Historic Columbia River Highway around Multnomah Falls. For more information, visit http://orsolutions.org/OSProject/ColumbiaHighwayCollaborative.

REDEDICATION OF THE HISTORIC COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY (SPRING – FALL 2016)
The Historic Columbia River Highway was constructed between 1913 and 1922 as America’s first scenic highway. Events will occur throughout 2016 to celebrate its history and beauty. For more information, visit https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/HCRH/Pages/Centennial.aspx.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Parking area congestion at Angel’s Rest trailhead.