

OREGON TRANSPORTATION PLAN UPDATE

Background Paper

Transportation and Tourism

Overview

In 2003, tourism in Oregon was a \$6.3 billion industry. It generated 89,500 jobs for Oregonians earning about \$1.7 billion in the industry. Tourism contributed more than \$241 million to local and state government revenues,¹ and continues to help diversify the economy at the state and local levels.

According to the Oregon Tourism Commission, many of Oregon's approximately 26 million annual day visitors are Oregonians, but the overnight trips are a mix of out-of-state, international and in-state visitors as the following graph shows:

**Travel Spending in Oregon
by Origin of Visitor, 2002**
(Percent of Total Travel Spending)*

| | Oregon | Other US | International | Total |
|--------------|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|--------------|
| Overnight | 23% | 40% | 4% | 67% |
| Day | 21% | 4% | 0% | 25% |
| Air Fares | 5% | 2% | 2% | 9% |
| TOTAL | 49% | 46% | 6% | 100% |

* Totals may not add due to rounding

The Tourism Policy in the 1992 Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP) recognizes the importance of tourism in Oregon's economy (see page 12). With the update of the plan and funding for promoting tourism, it is time to examine whether the transportation aspects of tourism can function more effectively. This paper focuses on tourism-related transportation activities, especially those activities related to state government functions, for the purpose of recommending policy changes in the update of the OTP.

The paper describes the tourism-related transportation activities in terms of the following questions:

1. What are the tourism-related transportation responsibilities and activities of state government agencies?
2. Are transportation services available so that a tourist can travel by a variety of modes? Are transportation services linked so that tourists can move from one mode to another easily?

¹Oregon Tourism Commission Website, <http://www.traveloregon.com>.

3. Is information about transportation to tourist attractions and activities available? Is the information coordinated so that a tourist knows how to transfer from one mode to another?
4. How are these transportation services and transportation-related attractions being marketed?
5. What are opportunities to expand tourism through transportation-related activities?

Finally, the paper describes policy gaps and issues that could be addressed in the OTP update. The information comes from Websites and interviews with the following:

- Todd Davidson, Director, Oregon Tourism Commission
- Dan Kaempff, Transportation Options Program Manager, Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) Public Transit
- Bob Krebs, Intercity Passenger Rail Coordinator, ODOT Rail Division
- Sean Loughran, Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation
- Pat Moran, Manager, Scenic Byways Program, ODOT Traffic Management
- Robin Phillips (now at Washington DOT) and Dinah Vanderhyde, Division Operations Manager, ODOT Public Transit Division
- Charlie Riordan, Senior Aviation Planner, Department of Aviation and
- Michael Ronkin, Manager, ODOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Program

Transportation and Tourism-Related Responsibilities in State Government

Oregon Tourism Commission

The Oregon Tourism Commission, a semi-independent state agency created by the 2003 Legislature, is the umbrella marketing arm for tourism in the state. Its mission is “to encourage economic growth and enhance the quality of life in Oregon through a strengthened economic impact of tourism throughout the state.”² The nine-member Commission guides nine staff members to increase tourism through statewide and regional marketing initiatives and to build partnerships and coordinate efforts among the travel-related industry. The Commission also operates the state’s border welcome centers. With the passage of House Bill 2267, the 2003 Legislature increased the Commission’s \$3.5 million budget to \$8-9 million, funded by a statewide lodging tax effective on January 1, 2004.

The Tourism Commission’s focus is on destination tourism, and its strategy is to generate new trips to Oregon and extend the current tourist’s visit. Staff members are also working to expand international visitation and exploring cruise visits. Opportunities for European tourist visits have increased with the extension of Lufthansa flights to Portland. Other airlines are developing flights to Portland from Mexico and Japan. About twelve cruise ships yearly stop at Astoria.

² Ibid.

Tourism Commission staff members coordinate with air, bike, intercity transit, rail and Scenic Byway programs.

Oregon Department of Aviation

The Oregon Department of Aviation's primary responsibility is to ensure that the existing and future airport system will be adequate to meet the needs of the state's citizens and businesses for air mobility. The department owns and operates 28 public use airports and regulates private use airports throughout Oregon. Many of these airports provide access to state parks, recreational areas and other tourist activities.

Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation

The Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation's mission is "to provide and protect outstanding natural, scenic, cultural, historic and recreational sites for enjoyment and education of present and future generations." State Parks' system of parks, heritage sites, lighthouses and historic transportation facilities caters to both state and out-of-state visitors. Along U.S. 101, State Parks maintains hiking trails and hiker/biker camps offering reduced fees for hikers and bicyclists.

The Department of Parks and Recreation programs are closely connected with those of Tourism, ODOT, and other state agencies. State parks are located on Scenic Byways; and the department uses a variety of funding sources, including Transportation Enhancement Funds to fund rail-to-trails and other transportation-related improvements. During events drawing large crowds, such as the Lewis and Clark Expedition, State Parks works with other agencies and local governments to provide bus shuttle services between attractions.

Oregon Department of Transportation

The Oregon Department of Transportation's mission is "to provide a safe, efficient transportation system that supports economic opportunity and livable communities for Oregonians." ODOT supports tourism through the provision of intercity bus and rail services, rail tourism programs and the Scenic Byway Program as well as information on ODOT Websites and the new 511 travel information calling system.

- **Public Transit Division**

The ODOT Public Transit Division supports intercity passenger transportation, general public transit for communities of under 50,000 population and special needs transportation through state and federal grants. The Intercity Bus grant program provides a subsidy to the Thruway motorcoaches interconnecting buses from the coast and central and eastern Oregon to Amtrak train services. Grant programs fund vehicles accessible to the disabled in rural areas that can be used as vehicles for special events and trips.

- **Rail Division**

The ODOT Rail Division supports passenger train services currently making two roundtrips daily between Eugene and Portland. The division designs the services, purchases train sets, supports signal and track improvements, supports station improvements, and coordinates and markets the services.

With the Public Transit Division, the Rail Division developed the Thruway bus services that connects over 30 communities to rail services; three feeder route services extend across the state:

- Central: Redmond-Bend-Chemult
- Coast: Portland-Seaside-Astoria
- Eastern: Bend-Burns-Ontario

In FY 2003 over 121,900 people or 334 people daily traveled on the Eugene-Portland corridor via Amtrak Cascades trains and Thruway motorcoaches. Ridership on the feeder routes reached almost 12,400 people in FY 2003. About 60-80 percent of Amtrak travelers are recreational visitors in the state. Funding for Thruway motorcoaches is from federal Intercity Bus Funds. Cost recovery for the services varies from 40 to 90 percent.

The Rail Division is a partner in the Lewis and Clark Explorer that runs in the summer months from Portland to Astoria as part of the Lewis and Clark Expedition bicentennial. ODOT owns the train, but partners, including the federal government, the City of Astoria and Astoria businesses, fund the train operations. The Rail Division put the train tour package together at the direction of legislators.

- **Scenic Byways Program**

The state and national Scenic Byways Programs highlight scenic federal, state and local highways and roads throughout Oregon. The Oregon Scenic Byways Program was created in 1994 to take advantage of the National Scenic Byways Program defined in Intermodal Surface Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). ODOT administers the program with an advisory committee that includes representatives of the federal Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, Oregon Tourism Commission, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Oregon Visitors and Convention Bureau and local governments. Scenic Byways are mainly auto-oriented, but bicyclists also use Scenic Byways for tours.

The program includes two byway classifications:

1. Scenic Byways, roads that have high national or statewide appeal, are at least 30 miles in length and can be toured by passenger car. Oregon has 14 Scenic Byways covering 2,204 miles of federal, state and local roads.
2. Tour Routes are roads that have high local or regional appeal, are a minimum 20 miles in length, and can be toured by passenger car or 4-wheel drive vehicle. Oregon has 9 Tour Routes, stretching 580 miles and including non-paved roads.

Oregon has more National Scenic Byways and All American Roads than any other state. Five of Oregon's Scenic Byways have been designated National Scenic Byways and are marketed in national publications. The federal All American Roads are the "best of the best" and are marketed internationally; Oregon has four All American Roads: the Historic Columbia River Highway, Volcanic Legacy Scenic Byway (including Crater Lake), Hells Canyon Scenic Byway, and Pacific Coast Scenic Byway (US 101). All of the Scenic Byways serve both transportation and tourism functions.

The process of designating a scenic byway begins with an application to ODOT presented by the local proponents; it's a grass roots effort. A rating team does a field evaluation and makes a recommendation to the Scenic Byways Advisory Committee. If the committee supports the designation, the local proponents do a management plan. When the plan is approved, the advisory committee's recommendation for designation goes to the Tourism Commission and then to the Transportation Commission for approval.

The major benefit of this program is potential economic development for rural communities around Oregon. The Scenic Byway designation means that communities are eligible for federal grants for marketing and byway management plan implementation. ODOT places signs marking the Scenic Byway and publishes a statewide brochure with the Tourism Commission to promote the byways. The Tourism Commission also does marketing and promotion.

- **Bicycle and Pedestrian Program**

The ODOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program focuses most of its resources on short urban trips that can be made on foot or by bicycle. But it also helps improve state highways and county roads that can be used for medium-long bicycle trips, ranging from an afternoon ride to a week-long trip across the state. ODOT has been creating bicycle-friendly highways, with wide-paved shoulders for close to 40 years. This infrastructure is available to touring cyclists.

Availability of Transportation and Links Between Modes

Public Transit

Public transit provides the connection between air and rail facilities and destinations. Transit districts and other agencies provide services to senior center special events and trips, casinos, and athletic events. Recently as many as one-third of attendees at an University of Oregon game came by bus. With the help of grants through ODOT, every community over 2500 people has a handicapped accessible vehicle for local services. There are about 500 vehicles in Oregon's rural areas available for chartering.

Rail

Trains provide accessibility to people with varying mobility and to other modes. Rail services offer direct travel links to communities without air service and ties to special events. Amtrak trains are ADA accessible and can carry bicycles. Amtrak trips are linked with intercity bus and local transit services at most train stops. Even the train stop in Chemult has connections to transportation that serve the recreational areas. Trains give small cities cheaper marketing opportunities.

Information Availability and Coordination

Tourism Commission Website

The Tourism Commission Website presents a variety of possibilities for trip itineraries, including popular attractions and activities. Todd Davidson, the Commission's Director, envisions the Website with dynamic databases encompassing lodging, restaurants, attractions, visitor amenities and transportation including TripCheck (see below). In the future, the Website could create package tours from travel descriptions or plans or desired type of experience (exploring the wine country, whitewater rafting, golfing, cycling, skiing, etc.). Integrating this kind of information with transportation information from TripCheck or a transportation trip planner would facilitate planning for visitors from out-of-state, especially those who prefer to travel without using a personal car.

TripCheck

TripCheck, an ODOT Website, offers travelers information on road conditions, camera views of mountain passes, winter travel information, highway mileage and alternate ways to travel. It links to airport, bus, rail, rideshare, and bicycle information. Pilots can view basic information about general aviation airports and commercial airports. Travelers can link to bus and rail services, schedules, fares, and phone numbers as well as to city and ODOT descriptions of bicycle routes, facilities and maps.

511

The 511 system gives travelers in Oregon and other states an easy way to access road and weather information by phone. By dialing 511, travelers can select updated reports about driving conditions by highway, mountain pass or major city.³

In July 2000, the Federal Communications Commission designated 511 as the national travel information number. The first 511 service was launched in northern Kentucky in June 2001, and by the end of 2003 more than 22 services existed. About additional 21 states are moving toward implementation of the services. The national goal is for 80 percent of Americans to have access to 511 by 2005.⁴

³News Media Center, ODOT, "New 511 phone number offers travel information," December 10, 2003.

⁴Ibid.

The national system is organized so that state and local transportation agencies, in collaboration with the private sector, determine where and when to establish services. ODOT's system was set up to be consistent with TripCheck and the previous traveler information number.

Regional Trip Planner

ODOT Public Transit Division, Information Services Division and Intelligent Transportation System (ITS) staff members are developing a Web services trip planner with Washington State Department of Transportation. The Regional Trip Planner will be a one-stop source for trip planning in Oregon and Washington. It will bring scheduled intra-city transit, intercity bus, rail and demand responsive transit information into one place.

The major task is to get the information into the Website and keep it updated. The first phase of the project expected to be released in mid-2005 will bring the appropriate information into one setting. The second phase will help users plan their itineraries.

Scenic Byways Website

Information about Scenic Byways is located on an ODOT Website linked to TripCheck. Information also appears on touch screens at the Oregon welcome centers and links to other attractions, food and lodging along the byways, but better links are needed with the Tourism Website.

State Parks Website

The Department of Parks and Recreation Website contains links to state parks, self-guided tours of parks, recreational areas, and other attractions, and cities on the tour routes. The Website links to Tourism, Scenic Byways and trails Websites.

Marketing of Transportation-Related Activities and Attractions

Public Transit

The ODOT Public Transit Division publicizes available transit and rail services through TripCheck and through material distributed to bus and rail stations, social service agencies, welcome centers and chambers of commerce.

Rail

The ODOT Rail Division works with tourism organizations to make them aware of what services are available and to help them use rail facilities and services. The Division's marketing benefits passenger rail services, including excursion trains. The staff also works with tourism interests to leverage funds for tourism activities. The division staff

assists in filling less popular train schedules by giving school groups and seniors discounts for low-cost field trips. Staff also work with cities in marketing rail and making the rail station an attractive city entrance.

Opportunities to Expand Tourism through Transportation-Related Activities

Bicycle Tourism Website

Although bicycling information, contact numbers and some maps are available through the ODOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Program Website, cycling, tourism and economic development advocates are proposing the creation of a Website, possibly through the Oregon Tourism Commission, with more comprehensive trip planning information. Their models are Maine, Vermont and Colorado Websites where cyclists can find inviting descriptions of bicycle tours, tour routes, maps and places to stay. Currently, people interested in riding in Oregon do not have a good source of information to plan their trip. Bicycle touring could bring tourist dollars to rural communities where automobile traffic is low without additional investment in facilities. The average touring cyclist staying in motels would spend from \$125 to \$150 per day on food, lodging and meals.

The consolidated Website would provide a one-stop bicycle tourism information clearinghouse, linking visiting bicyclists with the state's cycling experts, Oregon's hospitality industry, and trip planning information. The interactive Website would allow users to find information to create their own itineraries. Representatives of the Tourism Commission, ODOT Bicycle/Pedestrian and Public Transit programs, State Parks Department, and local governments as well as advocacy groups are currently discussing the proposal.

Aviation Tourism in Oregon

The Department of Aviation is identifying activities and attractions that general aviation users can visit from public use airports. The goal of the "Aviation Tourism in Oregon" program is to document and promote the recreational opportunities that are available in Oregon to people who own and operate general aviation airplanes. An Aviation tourism committee is defining the project and working to connect airport users with tourist destinations geographically and seasonally.

They are finding that the major problem is connecting with ground transportation to the destination events. The department is working with businesses in each airport area on the issues. Marketing is planned through an aviation conference in May 2004 and through advertising in aviation publications to link pilots to events, sponsors and businesses. The product of the effort will be a Website linking airports with activities and business sponsors.

Birding Trails

The Oregon Birding Trails Advisory Board was organized in 2001 to develop birding trails along state highways. Members of the board include representatives of Community Solutions, Tourism, ODOT, US Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and conservation groups. The sponsoring groups recognized the popularity of wildlife watching. The US Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that Oregon hosted nearly 1.7 million wildlife watchers in 2002; 509,000 of these were non-residents. The visitors spent over \$3 million in the state on trip-related expenses.⁵

The Board's Website announces the designation of the first of seven major trails for the state. This Cascades Trail covers over 1,000 miles and key birding sites in the Cascade Mountains. More designations are underway. The Website links to Websites of the sponsoring agencies and organizations, including the Scenic Byways Program and State Parks.

Opportunities and Recommendations

Those interviewed for this paper see a number of opportunities to expand transportation-related tourism. Their overall message is that Oregon needs to leverage its infrastructure and facilities, and work with the tourism industry, transportation providers and others to coordinate services and enhance marketing.

Oregon has made major investments in bicycle, highway, public transportation, rail, and aviation facilities and services and could maximize its investments for tourism. For example, riding a train, especially the novel Talgo, has a psychological draw for many people. Oregon could take advantage of the draw and market tours involving rail, especially tours for those traveling without a vehicle. The Astoria line, operating during the Lewis and Clark celebration, is designed to attract tour groups. Both the proposed bicycle tourism Website and aviation tourism Website would take advantage of existing facilities and link them to tourist attractions.

A number of specific recommendations would implement this direction:

1. ODOT, Aviation, State Parks, Tourism, and other agencies should work closely together to coordinate information, Websites, marketing and tourism-related activities. One action should be to secure federal funding to create and enhance travel information tools, such as TripCheck, Regional Trip Planner and 511.
2. More information is needed about visitor demands and spending.
3. Attention and resources should be given to providing easy transfers from mode to mode. An out-of-state visitor should be able to easily transfer and get to most places in the state without using an automobile.
4. Tickets for rail, intercity bus and other transportation elements should be interlined so that transfers are quick and easy.

⁵ "What can 'birding economic' bring to Oregon communities?"
<http://oregonbirdingtrails.org/economics.htm>

5. Bicycle tourism information should be integrated with other tourism marketing.
6. Passenger trains need stable funding so that tourists can count on the services. The state has invested over \$60 million in trains, but uncertainty about services being funded has possibly cost the state about \$100,000 a year.
7. Funding another Portland-Eugene train would make visiting the lower Willamette Valley more attractive to tourists. The trains could be scheduled more frequently and conveniently.
8. Attention should be given to transportation connections between tourist attractions and the housing affordable to the attractions' employees.

An interagency (state and federal) task force with industry and local representatives should develop a strategic plan for tourism transportation, with the emphasis on a coordinated, integrated program that takes advantage of the state's current transportation infrastructure and multiple attractions. The OTP Tourism Policy should be updated to reflect these recommendations. (See current policy in Appendix A.)

Appendix A

Current Oregon Transportation Plan Policies and Actions Related to Tourism

POLICY 1E – Connectivity among Places

It is the policy of the State of Oregon to identify and develop a statewide transportation system of corridors and facilities that ensures appropriate access to all areas of the state, nation and the world.

ACTION 1E.2

Identify significant out-of-state corridors or areas where Oregonians need access and encourage their development. Identify transportation needs that extend beyond state borders in order to promote solutions that will increase multimodal connections to state systems, to meet the needs of residents and businesses located near state borders, and to encourage interstate access to major tourist destinations within Oregon.

ACTION 1E.3

Develop and promote service in statewide transportation corridors by the most appropriate mode including intercity bus, truck, rail, airplane, passenger vehicle and bicycle.

ACTION 1E.5

In cooperation with local governments and federal agencies, develop a rural areas transportation access plan for state and federal lands and recreation areas.

POLICY 1F – Connectivity among Modes and Carriers

It is the policy of the State of Oregon to provide a transportation system with connectivity among modes within and between urban areas, with ease of transfer among modes and between local and state transportation systems.

ACTION 1F.1

Require local and regional transportation plans to identify (a) major transportation terminals and facilities and (b) routes and modes connecting passenger and freight facilities with major highways and intermodal facilities.

ACTION 1F.2

Encourage development of a system of open access passenger facilities throughout the state to expedite transfers between modes, routes and carriers.

POLICY 3E – Tourism

It is the policy of the State of Oregon to develop a transportation system that supports intrastate, interstate and international tourism and improves access to recreational destinations.

ACTION 3E.1

Develop a tourism transportation action plan to identify facilities and services to serve tourism and incorporate in state and local transportation plans.

ACTION 3E.2

Identify certain transportation corridors as scenic routes and consider scenic values in corridor planning, improvements and maintenance.