

2 DOCUMENT/PLAN REVIEW

The review of plans, projects, and studies described in this section is intended to support and provide direction to the transit development efforts in the Columbia River Gorge study area. The documents reviewed in the following section are outlined in Figure 2-1.

Figure 2-1 Document Review Overview

Year	Document Title	Reference (see Appendix A for full citation)
Ongoing Planning Efforts		
2016	Mount Hood Transit Implementation Plan	(LSC Transportation Consultants, 2015a, 2015b)
2016	Gorge Tourism Studio	(Travel Oregon, 2015)
2016	Oregon Solutions: Historic Columbia River Highway Collaborative Assessment	(Oregon Solutions, 2015)
Published Documents		
2015	Columbia River Gorge Management Units Plan	(Oregon State Parks, 2015)
2015	Oregon Travel Impacts, 1991-2014p	(Dean Runyan Associates, 2015)
2014	Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Interagency Recreation Strategy	(Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Interagency Recreation Strategy Team, 2014)
2014	Columbia River Gorge Bicycle Recreation: Economic Impact Forecast for the Communities Along the Historic Columbia River Highway	(Dean Runyan Associates, 2014)
2013	Columbia River Gorge Meta-Analysis: A Spatial and Temporal Examination of Outdoor Recreation	(Burns, Chuprinko, & Shrestha, 2013)
2011	Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area	(Columbia River Gorge Commission, 2011)
2011	Columbia River Gorge Vital Signs Indicators Resident and Visitor Study	(Burns, 2011)
2011	Oregon 2011 Regional Visitor Report, Mt. Hood – Columbia River Gorge	(Longwoods Travel USA, 2011)
2011	Visitor Use Report – Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area	(USDA Forest Service Region 6, 2011)
2008	Gorge TransLink Coordination Project	(Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates, 2008)

ONGOING PLANNING EFFORTS

Mount Hood Transit Implementation Plan (2016)

Drafts of two reports were available from LSC Transportation Consultants in December 2016:

- Mount Hood Express Service Expansion Analysis
- Service and Sustainable Operations Plan

These two reports are reviewed below.

Mount Hood Express Service Expansion Analysis

The Mountain Express bus transit service operated on the US-26 corridor between the City of Sandy and Rhododendron between 2004 and 2013. In 2013, with the aid of a Federal Lands Access Program (FLAP) grant, the service was expanded to reach Timberline lodge, a popular Mt. Hood recreation destination, and was renamed 'The Mt. Hood Express'. Continuing growth in ridership and desire from stakeholder agencies prompted Clackamas County (the operator of Mt. Hood Express) to investigate long-term funding solutions to sustain and possibly expand the service. LSC Transportation Consultants is working under the guidance of Clackamas County and the Mt. Hood Transportation Alliance (MHTA) Advisory Committee to evaluate existing conditions and propose future service and funding options; a draft report of their findings regarding service recommendations was available for review (LSC Transportation Consultants, 2015a).

The report considered several sources of information in making service recommendations:

- An on-board rider survey
- An on-board ridership data collection
- A survey of residents in the study area and visitors to the Mt. Hood region
- Public outreach meetings in Mt. Hood Area communities
- Market analysis using census data
- Peer review

Several service alternatives were proposed, ranging from a curtailing of operations if a sustainable funding source is not identified to an expansion of bus service north to Hood River and/or south to Warm Springs. A recommended alternative was not yet proposed in this draft report.

Mount Hood Service and Sustainable Operations Plan

This separate report addresses funding and governance for continuing and possibly expanding the Mt. Hood Express transit service. Several different governance options are reviewed (e.g., maintaining governance by Clackamas County, creating a transportation district, creating and intergovernmental transit agency) and the recommendation to continue governance and operations under Clackamas County is made. The report recommends operating the service through the Transportation Department as a Division of Public Transit; it is currently operated by Clackamas County's Department of Social Services. The report outlines a financial plan that recommends pursuing as many different funding sources as possible, including continuing to apply for federal funding (like the FLAP grant, 5310, and 5311 currently being used), continuing to utilize ODOT's Special Transportation Fund (STF), soliciting private sector contributions, continuing to receive funding from the county, and pursuing new taxation opportunities.

Gorge Tourism Studio (2016)

The Gorge Tourism Studio program is a series of tourism development workshops designed to assist communities interested in stimulating their local economies through sustainable tourism development, while protecting and enhancing local resources¹. The program is offered by Travel Oregon in partnership with 26 agencies and organizations. The Gorge Tourism Studio plans to develop the skills of communities and stakeholders in addressing these key transportation related challenges:

- Heavy seasonality of visitation
- Congestion at key attractions during peak season
- Capitalizing on and making the most of visionary projects underway in the Gorge
- Connecting resources for marketing the area as a destination

Oregon Solutions: Historic Columbia River Highway Collaborative Assessment (2016)

Oregon Solutions is an organization tasked by the Oregon Governor's office with resolving interagency conflicts related to sustainability and communities. The Historic Columbia River Highway Collaborative was designated by the Governor Kate Brown as an Oregon Solutions project in October 2015 with the focus of resolving congestion issues in the CRG while encouraging increasing levels of tourism and recreation.

PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS

Columbia River Gorge Management Units Plan (2015)

Plan Overview

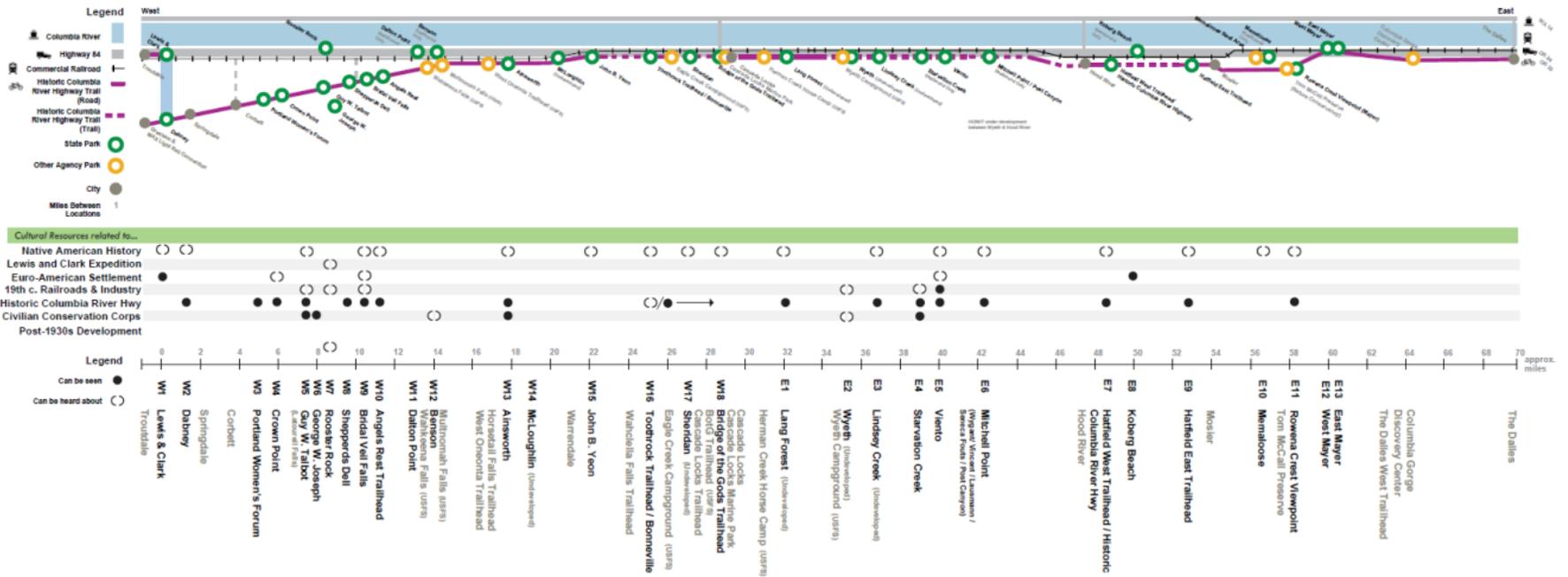
The Columbia River Gorge Management Units Plan was facilitated by the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD), combining the inputs of federal agencies, state agencies, counties, cities, tribes, and stakeholders in the CRG area to agree upon common resource management and planning goals. The plan particularly addressed several factors in its update of the last plan (1994):

- Incorporation of ongoing Historic Columbia River Highway planning efforts into the Plan
- Increasing visitation to the CRG
- Economic opportunity sought via increased recreation
- Increased sophistication in natural resource understanding and management

As part of a unifying vision in the Plan, a Cultural Resources Inventory was developed and a corresponding map of the resources and how they are connected was created as illustrated in Figure 2-2. This diagram provides an overview of cultural resources and destinations on the Oregon side of the CRG.

¹ <http://industry.traveloregon.com/industry-resources/destination-development/rural-tourism-studio/columbia-gorge/>

Figure 2-2 Cultural Resources Network Diagram



Source: (Oregon State Parks, 2015)

The plan proposes specific improvements throughout the CRG corresponding to five different recreation types it identifies: hiking, cycling, water recreation, camping, and automobile touring. Automobile touring is identified as one cause of traffic congestion in the CRG, and the need to facilitate multi-modal transportation is mentioned, but no specific recommendations are made.

Public outreach efforts are reviewed within the plan, and several key themes were drawn from discussions with stakeholders and the public. One of those themes is identified as “Transportation and Congestion”. The results of the public outreach process indicated a consensus on the following ideas:

- A partnership with Gorge stakeholders and organizations should be developed to study Gorge-wide transportation alternatives, including the potential for ferries and shuttles using National Park Service models. Such a study should consider the following:
 - Design capacity of parks relative to maintaining a quality recreation experience.
 - Development of a shuttle to operate on a regular interval schedule and make stops in some parks
 - Options for transit service in the CRG
 - Partnerships with ODOT to consider developing a safer bike route from the Gresham MAX station to Dabney State Park and the rest of the Historic Columbia River Highway
- Promotion of carpooling, rideshare, and public transportation options for accessing CRG parks. The following details regarding these alternative modes are identified:
 - Support development of electric car charging stations at parks and reserved parking spaces for using green energy vehicles or a carpool
 - Explore providing discount day and overnight use fees for those arriving via car share or public transportation.

Additional comments from the public outreach process indicated that transit access should be provided to the Gorge. Service with stops in Cascade Locks and Hood River should be provided to facilitate this, including trips on the weekends to serve visitor traffic.

Rooster Rock

The Management Units Plan investigated each cultural resource area in the CRG separately to assess existing conditions and plans/opportunities for improvements. Rooster Rock has a very large parking area with minimal pedestrian amenities and large expanses of pavement. Rooster Rock has the potential to serve as a park and ride location for a shuttle service, but parking capacity may be an issue at some peak demand times. Parking demand is significantly less than capacity during most of the year, but large gatherings during the summer can utilize the lot to capacity.

Oregon Travel Impacts, 1991-2014p (2015)

This report examines the economic impacts of travel at the state, region, and county levels across Oregon from 1991 to 2014. ‘Mt. Hood/The Gorge’ is one of the regions examined – pages 57-60 summarize the following economic indicators regarding travel:

- Visitor spending
- Visitor volume

- Revenues from travel expenditures
- Employment supporting travel
- Tax receipts at the local and state levels from expenditures in travel

These metrics are also separated by consumer commodity (e.g., accommodations, food, retail sales), by temporal trip span, and accommodation type. These metrics are also aggregated by county to discern differences in economic indicators between the four Oregon counties in the Gorge area.

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Interagency Recreation Strategy (2014)

The growth in recreation demand in the CRG and its associated negative externalities (e.g., natural resource impacts, traffic congestion) as well as the decline in available financial resources prompted the forming of a team of public recreation managers to coordinate in addressing the challenges of balancing recreation opportunities and resource management. The team is called the Columbia River Gorge Interagency Recreation Strategy team, and is composed of members from the following organizations:

- U.S. Forest Service Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Office
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. National Park Service Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Oregon Parks and Recreation Department
- Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission
- Washington Department of Natural Resources
- Oregon Department of Transportation
- Washington Department of Transportation
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Confederated Tribes of the Yakima Nation
- Columbia River Gorge Commission

The report contains an overview of natural resource conditions, recreation activities, trends in use and access (citing the results of (Burns et al., 2013; Burns, 2011)), and a discussion of growing concerns of the organizations. The plan proposes the following goals and corresponding strategies outlined in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-3 CRG National Scenic Area Interagency Recreation Strategy Goals and Strategies

Goal	Strategy
Create a common vision for recreation in the Columbia River Gorge.	Ensure the existing regional plan is clearly understood and develop an interagency vision for regional recreation.
Clarify roles and identify the strengths and focus areas of each agency.	Meet with agencies to clearly define roles, strengths, and opportunities to leverage collective strengths through enhanced partnerships.
Practice working collaboratively toward recreation sustainability.	Improve communication and interagency collaboration through regular meetings, explore agreements and grant opportunities, and consider an annual recreation summit to address recreation demand and resource impacts.
Develop management strategies to address increasing demand, unmanaged recreation, and the capacity needs to meet current and future demand.	Address demand and unmanaged recreation through early engagement; map critical resources, existing and proposed recreation, and unmanaged recreation areas to provide context for management and planning efforts; formalize a stakeholder engagement process for added collaboration; and explore a trail master plan to address demand, management and unauthorized use. Strategies to build capacity include partnership and grant opportunities and developing a clearing house of volunteers.
Increase citizen stewardship.	Foster existing partnerships and volunteers while growing new relationships; develop a communications strategy to actively educate recreation users and improve stewardship.

Columbia River Gorge Meta-Analysis: A Spatial and Temporal Examination of Outdoor Recreation (2013)

This study expands on the analysis published in 2011 (Burns, 2011). Similar to that study, intercept survey methods were used to examine visitor demographics, preferences, and trip characteristics; activity levels and types; and economic outcomes.

Survey results indicated that the majority (53%) of visitors traveled from relatively nearby locations (50 miles or less) to visit the CRG. 64% of the visitors indicated they visited the CRG on day trips and spent an average of three hours recreating. These results indicate that a majority of visitors come from nearby locations to spend a portion of their day recreating in the CRG; long-term or overnight trips and visitors from farther locations do utilize the CRG but are less common.

Time series analyses conducted using the survey results also revealed an increase in recreation activities in the CRG and a corresponding increase in the perception of crowding. Several spatial subsets (called ‘niches’ – discrete areas of the CRG such as the ‘Wall and Falls’) were used to compare the above survey results across areas of the CRG.

Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (2011)

The U.S. Congress commissioned the Management Plan for the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, and the original plan was adopted in 1992. Revisions (adopted in 2004) were

incorporated in 2007, amendments and updates to the plan have been approved through September 2011. Transportation related policies stipulated in the plan are reviewed below.

Management Plan Goals

- Provide transportation facilities that meet the needs of the traveling public and implement this plan's recreation goals and objectives while protecting scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources.
- Promote alternative modes of transportation to improve the safety and enjoyment of the traveling public and to help alleviate future traffic demand.

Management Plan Objectives

- Encourage the provision of alternate modes of transportation to recreation destinations to reduce resource impacts and facilitate visitation by all segments of the public. Such alternate modes include, but are not limited to, shuttles, buses, bicycles, and boat access.
- Encourage tour boat and tour train access to important recreation facilities (such as the Gorge Discovery Center) as mass transportation alternatives that offer both access to such sites and recreational experiences in themselves.
- Improve linkages between different modes of transportation at major recreation sites in the Scenic Area.
- Improve access to recreation opportunities in the Scenic Area for the physically-challenged, less affluent, and other underrepresented user groups.

Management Plan Policies

- Accommodation of facilities for mass transportation (e.g., bus turnarounds) shall be required for all new high-intensity day-use recreation sites, except for sites predominantly devoted to boat access. These facilities are also encouraged for all new moderate-intensity day-use recreation sites where practicable.
- All transportation facilities or improvements associated with public recreation shall be designed to minimize impacts to scenic, natural, cultural, and recreation resources to the maximum extent practicable.

Management Plan Strategies

- Encourage provision of alternative modes of transportation (including bus, shuttles, rail, and boat) to recreation destinations in order to reduce resource impacts and to facilitate visitation by all segments of the public.
- Encourage provision of transportation modes that are recreational in nature.
- Improve linkages between different modes of transportation at major recreation sites in the Scenic Area.
- Encourage comprehensive recreation planning that fosters a unified, regional approach.
- Provide additional opportunities and facilities for recreational access to the Columbia River and its tributaries, scenic appreciation, and other resource-based recreation uses.

Columbia River Gorge Vital Signs Indicators Resident and Visitor Study (2011)

This study focused on assessing the following aspects of visits to the CRG using intercept survey methods to assess demographic, socioeconomic, and trip characteristics; consumer satisfaction and visitor preferences; and economic outcomes.

The survey indicated that 62% of visitors arrived to the CRG via I-84, 22% arrived via SR-14, and 12% arrived via the Historic Columbia River Highway. The most visited cultural attractions in the CRG (as measured by the survey) were the Historic Columbia River Highway, Multnomah Falls, and Vista House. Non-local visitors were over three times as likely to visit these sites as local visitors. The majority of survey respondents did not feel the CRG was too crowded on their trip.

Oregon 2011 Regional Visitor Report, Mt. Hood – Columbia River Gorge (2011)

A representative sample of survey respondents was drawn from 2010-2011 visitors to the Mt. Hood-Columbia River Gorge region, and these respondents were asked a series of questions regarding economic indicators, visitor profiles, and activity preferences. Transportation mode shares are identified for overnight trips to the CRG on page 25 with a breakdown of the personal (e.g., personal/rental car, bicycle) and commercial (e.g., plane, train, bus) vehicle types used. All of the statistics for the Mt. Hood-CRG trips are compared with statewide statistics to illustrate differences in the proportions between the CRG and Oregon state.

Visitor Use Report, Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (2011)

The National Visitor User Monitoring (NVUM) program collects and publishes data describing visitors, their preferences, and their behaviors at the national, regional, and forest level. The most recent published report (2011) indicated that a majority of visitors came from nearby locations; primarily from the Portland metro area. Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics regarding the visitors are also available, as well as data regarding economic outcomes (e.g., spending patterns).

Gorge TransLink Coordination Project (2008)

A report summarizing the results of the Gorge TransLink Coordination Project was completed by Nelson\Nygaard in 2008. Gorge TransLink is an alliance of rural transportation providers in the Gorge Skamania and Klickitat Counties, WA and Hood River, Wasco, and Sherman Counties, OR. This project reviewed previous coordinated transportation planning efforts and proposed interagency guidelines for Gorge TransLink partners to more seamlessly connect different transit services in the CRG. The proposed guidelines were as follows:

- Transfers
 - Clearly identify transfer locations.
 - Coordinate schedules for timed transfers to the greatest extent possible.
 - Interagency operator communication should occur to facilitate system transfers.

- Passengers are expected to transfer by their own means or with assistance from a personal aide or companion.
- Fares
 - Develop a consistent fare policy that allows fares to be transferred among different services.
 - Develop a universal fare instrument to be recognized by all services.
- Transit operators will make information available on how to utilize one or more transit services in the CRG.

Recommendations were also made regarding opportunities for vanpool programs. Finally, recommendations were made to designate the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD) as ‘Lead Agency’ and enable MCEDD to coordinate among the agencies to reach strategic goals, such as applying for grant funding for new or improved services.

KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings from the published and ongoing planning efforts that help demonstrate the need for expanded transportation options, especially improved transit mobility and access, in the Columbia River Gorge.

Increases in Visitation and Activity

Economic activity (e.g., visitation, spending) has increased rapidly in the CRG area. While this increase in activity has resulted in economic benefits for the agencies, communities, and businesses in and around the CRG area, associated negative externalities (e.g., traffic congestion, crowding) are becoming increasingly apparent. Many of the planning efforts reviewed herein are grappling with the challenge of encouraging increasing levels of economic activity while still maintaining a quality recreation experience and minimizing natural resource impacts. Transportation planning is one tool that can be used to address these seemingly conflicting objectives.

Transportation Options

Increased economic activity in the CRG area has led to an increased desire from agencies, stakeholders, and members of the public for transportation options in the CRG area. Different ideas have been proposed for what these transportation options might look like; the options proposed are reviewed below:

- Encouragement of carpool, rideshare, and car sharing programs for travel to and within the CRG area. These options could be incentivized using reduced fees for park visitation or reserved parking spaces for high occupancy vehicles.
- Shuttle/bus service circulating throughout CRG destinations
- Bus service connecting nearby regional transit systems with CRG destinations
- Possible expansion of Mt. Hood Express bus transit service north to Hood River

Bicycle Recreation/Travel

Increasing levels of bicycle recreation in the CRG (Dean Runyan Associates, 2014) could present an opportunity for increased transit use in the CRG area. It is estimated that bicycle recreation

and travel in the CRG will continue to grow as the new sections of the Historic Columbia River Highway continue to open to bicyclists in the future. Bicyclists may be able to utilize transit for some portion of their trip. Transit service could enable some bicyclists to park their vehicles further from areas of the CRG overburdened by parking demand; or negate the necessity of a vehicle altogether for those traveling from nearby areas.

New transportation services in the CRG should accommodate bicyclists to the best extent possible by providing bicycle racks on vehicles, bicycle parking areas at transit stops and destinations, and being cognizant of sharing the roadway with bicyclists. Improving the accommodation of bicycle travel in the CRG can have a positive impact on the growth in economic activity related to bicycle travel and could potentially decrease reliance on automobiles in the CRG.