

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

The beauty of the Columbia River Gorge attracts thousands of visitors each day, particularly on weekends when the sun is shining. During these times, parking demand is often at or over capacity and access to picture-perfect sites such as Multnomah Falls can be challenging. With the 100th anniversary of the Historic Columbia River Highway approaching this year, local communities, public agencies, and land managers are looking for ways to mitigate congestion and provide transportation options. The Columbia River Gorge Transit Study was undertaken to understand existing transportation in the Columbia River Gorge (CRG) area, assess the market for transit to serve visitors and residents, and develop and recommend transit service options for two distinct timeframes:

- **Summer 2016 and summer 2017** – Pilot service to coincide with Historic Columbia River Highway 100th Anniversary and summertime parking congestion at Multnomah Falls.
- **2018-2020** – Near term service expansion between Portland and Hood River with stops at key Gorge destinations to serve a broader market and additional needs.

Project Goals

The Columbia River Gorge Transit Study is being guided by the following goals which all service options strive to achieve.

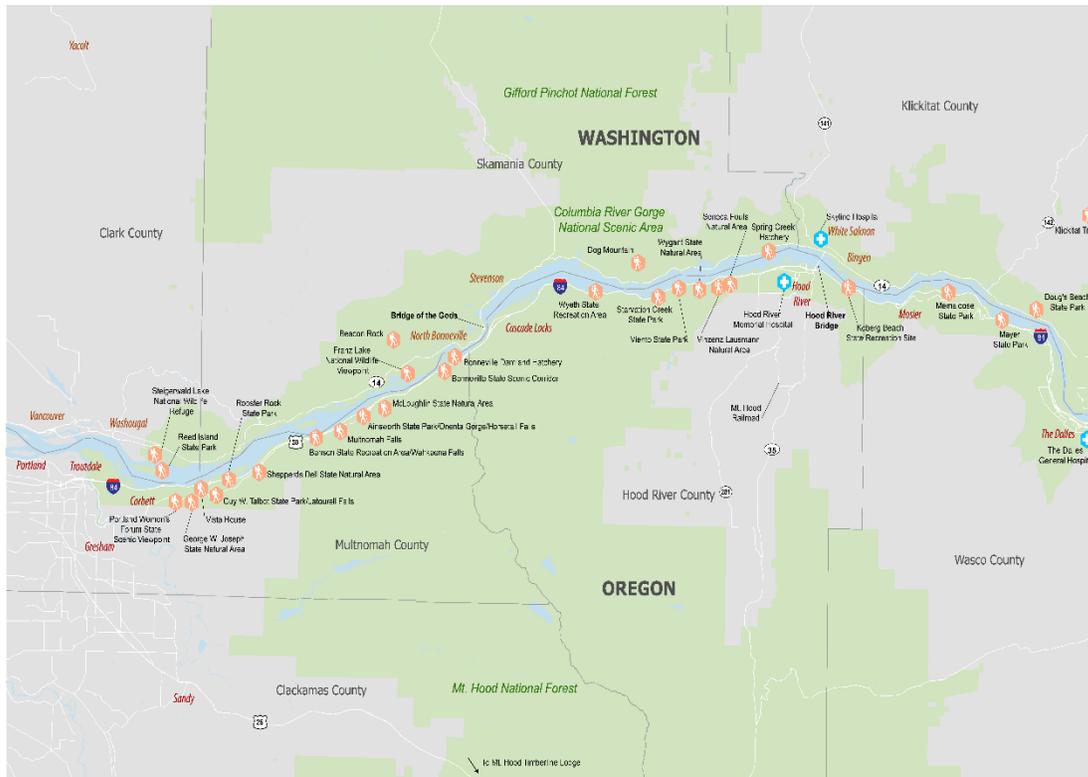
- Improve transit access and options to recreational destinations in the Columbia River Gorge and between East Multnomah County and The Dalles
- Enhance Gorge mobility and safety
- Address congestion and limited parking capacity at Multnomah Falls
- Protect natural and cultural resources by reducing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

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. This study will identify near-term transit solutions for both residents and visitors.

Study Area

The study area extends from the Portland Metro Area to the west to The Dalles to the east, along the I-84 Corridor (Oregon side of the Gorge). A study area map is presented in Figure 1-1.

Figure 1-1 Study Area Map



SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This report reviews relevant planning documents, describes the existing conditions of transit in the Columbia River Gorge, and analyzed the market for future transit utilizing stakeholder and general public feedback. The findings from these investigations highlight several key themes that will direct the development of future transit service alternatives in the Columbia River Gorge. These themes are outlined below:

- **Increasing visitation has resulted in negative externalities.** Recent increases in visitation to Columbia River Gorge area destinations have been an economic boon for Gorge communities, but have produced negative effects for the natural environment, contributed to traffic congestion issues, and decreased visitor satisfaction due to resource competition. Visitation is expected to continue to increase, and the associated increased economic activity is beneficial for Gorge communities, but demand needs to be managed effectively to maintain access to resources and promote sustainable growth.
- **Congestion issues on the Historic Columbia River Highway.** As a result of the increased visitation and a constrained transportation network, traffic congestion and parking availability issues have become increasingly frequent occurrences. In order to address congestion issues, preserve a quality visitor experience, and enable increased access to Gorge destinations, transit service has been recommended by many plans and stakeholders.
- **Visitors want transit service.** Visitors overwhelmingly indicated they would consider using public transit to reach Gorge area destinations, yet current transit services are very

limited. Skamania County has offered a weekend bus service to reach trailheads on the Washington side of the Gorge for the last two years, but performance and ridership have been relatively low. Columbia Area Transit offers infrequent intercity transit in the Gorge area, but this is not useful for visitors or residents visiting recreational destinations. There is a clear desire for more accessible, convenient, and frequent transit service in the Gorge, and existing services can be leveraged to support this future service.

- **Gateway Transit Center is likely the key connection to greater Portland area transit.** Gateway Transit Center was ranked the most convenient location for connecting to Gorge transit routes with existing Portland area transit. A Gorge area transit service could connect with TriMet buses and light rail and C-Tran buses at Gateway, which would then allow riders to connect with other local and regional services around the western Gorge area.
- **Multnomah Falls is the key destination for transit in the Gorge and is also the location of the most acute congestion issues.** Transit service in the Gorge that serves the visitor market must make a stop at Multnomah Falls in order to provide access to this top visitor destination and address congestion issues.
- **Hood River is a key destination for transit in the Gorge, and can also be utilized as a transfer point.** Hood River was the second most highly ranked destination for transit (after Multnomah Falls) among both visitors and residents. It also represents an opportunity to connect to Mt. Adams Transportation Service (for transportation across the Hood River Bridge to White Salmon/Bingen) and the existing CAT service to The Dalles. If the Mt. Hood Express were to expand service from Timberline Lodge north to Hood River (as is under consideration), riders could complete a full loop around Mt. Hood.

REPORT PURPOSE & ORGANIZATION

This report is the first element of the study's planning effort and is intended to serve as the foundation for the development of service alternatives.

This report consists of four additional chapters, which are summarized below:

- Chapter 2 reviews recently completed and in-progress planning documents.
- Chapter 3 describes existing public and private transit services operating in the CRG area.
- Chapter 4 summarizes a market analysis conducted utilizing stakeholder and general public outreach.
- Chapter 5 synthesizes the findings from the document review, existing transit service analysis, and the market analysis to support the development of future transit service alternatives.