

May 3, 2020

Governor's Coronavirus Economic Advisory Council  
900 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301

Re: COVID-19 State Reopening Plan Feedback

Dear Council Members,

Travel Oregon is pleased to serve on the Governor's Coronavirus Economic Advisory Council and is committed to helping the state build plans for reopening our communities in a way that is consistent with public health standards so that as we rebuild our economy, we also protect the health of all Oregonians. As the state's destination marketing and management organization, we are in continuous communications with our regional and local partners and want to bring those perspectives to the work of this committee. Part of our perspectives relate to the operational components of reopening the sectors that support our tourism economy and other perspectives relate to how we communicate new standards or guidelines with those sectors as well as the public.

This letter begins to outline some recommendations or issues for consideration regarding the draft plans for non-essential travel, the county-by-county framework and outdoor recreation. While we understand that these reflect the perspectives of one industry, we believe they are important as part of a comprehensive plan and we support the state's objective to responsibly open businesses and natural areas in a strategic and intentional way.

### **Non-Essential Travel**

Non-essential travel is currently being discussed because the summer months are upon us and we know from recent studies that the public is beginning to hit a threshold of tolerance for the stay-home order. We agree that public health must guide when we reopen certain areas of the state, but we would like to understand why and how 50 miles was set as the initial limitation in a phase I opening. We believe that setting a mileage limit will give the public a false sense of security and safety and lead them to believe that they are complying with public health regulations simply by staying within 50 miles of their home. We also are concerned essential and non-essential travel definitions need to be clearly communicated with the public. Additional challenges the agency believes must be discussed before adopted include:

1. Interpretation of distance will cause confusion: Is it 50 miles from the city boundary, the individual's home, as the crow flies, or road mileage?
2. Potential for overwhelming certain areas: High use outdoor recreation sites near more populated areas will make it difficult to adhere to social distancing guidelines, causing greater impacts. For example, the Mt. Hood National Forest, Sauvie Island and Columbia River Gorge are all within 50 miles of the Portland metro area. With a 50 miles limitation, Portland metro area residents could flood these outdoor recreational sites and overwhelm

public land managers, facilities and people seeking to recreate within the social distancing and public health guidelines.

3. Enforcement of the limit is difficult: Public land managers have expressed concern around the 50-mile limit as they have neither the authority nor the capacity to enforce this.
4. Potential conflict with county standards: As the state moves toward a county-by-county operational model, a state sanctioned 50-mile boundary could conflict with county guidance. The public could easily violate a county's standards but think they are in compliance by remaining within 50 miles of home, and county officials could be forced to expend resources to manage this confusion as people cross county lines.

#### **Alternative Recommendation for Consideration:**

1. Remove 50-mile limits and instead use guidance around non-essential/essential travel within county boundaries. Additional parameters may be set by specific public land management agencies and communities within counties in accordance with public health guidelines established by the state.
2. Clearly define essential and non-essential travel. Travel Oregon can help in the development of these definitions and the dissemination of information to the public and regional partners.
  - a. Essential (work) travel -- it is incumbent upon you/your employer to understand the rules associated with your essential (work) travel. This may be for your work, caring for family, or the need to acquire essential items (household food and supplies (including take out), medical prescriptions, medical visits, and financial needs).
  - b. Non-essential (leisure) travel – this is for the public and related to personal health and wellness. This includes outdoor recreation activities. Non-essential travel is not crucial to the functioning of society during a crisis. It is critical that the public comply with social distancing and public health guidelines when participating in non-essential trips.

#### **State/County Reopening Structure**

1. There remains a great deal of confusion about a county-by-county phased reopening and how it will be applied statewide, especially as limited non-essential travel restrictions begin to be lifted. As noted above the 50 miles does not alleviate this confusion but only adds to it. There are counties in Oregon that heavily rely on visitors from other regions of the state to drive their economy. For example, we have heard from partners in Southern Oregon that in order to rebuild their economy, they will depend on visitors from outside counties.
2. Additionally, there is confusion around which county requirement a resident must follow: If Baker County is on Phase 3, which allows non-essential travel, but Multnomah County

has not yet entered Phase 1, is it possible for Multnomah County residents to travel to Baker County?

3. Communication to the public has been unclear on how the state approach and counties approaches overlap/relate to each other.

**Recommendations for Consideration:**

1. Allow counties, in accordance with public health officials, to determine if they are open to outside visitors. Some counties may be ready to welcome visitors during the state’s Phase 1, while others may not be prepared to open for visitors until much later. Counties may select whether to allow non-essential travel to and within their county. By establishing county by county guidance around welcoming visitors, the 50-mile limit is unnecessary and gives more clarity to the public. If traveling through counties that do not allow non-essential travel, people should limit all transactions within those counties and ensure they are complying with all public health guidelines.
2. Establish a website for centralized communications to consumers. This approach will require a website that provides a statewide county-by-county map with clear information about public health requirements, reopening phases, and travel/visitor guidance. The site should communicate which counties are open to visitors, which remain closed, and which reopening phase each county is on. This can be done in partnership with public land management agencies as well as local communities. The website should provide clear and concise information for residents and visitors. If helpful, Travel Oregon can assist in developing this communication resource.

**Opening outdoor recreation day-use and camping**

We understand that Oregonians value outdoor recreation and scenic beauty and that these experiences are important to the health and well-being of Oregonians. It is also part of our great appeal as a destination both for instate and out-of-state visitors. We agree that slowly providing access to recreational activities for Oregon residents can be managed with low risk. However, this can only be done if outdoor recreation providers have the capacity and resources to manage sites in accordance with public health guidance. If outdoor recreation sites are not opened properly, it may lead to re-closures in the short-term and deep economic damages in the long term. Further clarity on county versus mile radius from home must be clear before reopening any overnight camping sites or day use sites

**Recommendations for Consideration:**

1. Washington state is reopening certain outdoor recreation day use areas on May 5. Before releasing Oregon’s guidelines around outdoor recreation, we advise that the state observe visitor behavior in Washington.
2. Slowly stagger the opening of recreation sites. Begin opening less heavily trafficked recreation sites where social distancing will be more easily achieved.
3. Keep high-traffic areas closed until more remote locations have successfully reopened, and procedures are assessed.

4. Consider allowing camping only at sites that:
  - a. Require registration and will support contact tracing
  - b. Can enforce social distance guidelines
  - c. Collects fees that can support operations
  - d. Focus on cleanliness in areas such as restrooms

The intent of these suggestions is to help inform our conversations so that the reopening plans successfully meet their goals and objectives. We know the governor's advisors, public health officials, and other state agencies are working around the clock to develop this guidance in a short timeline. We are grateful for your continued support of the travel and tourism industry. As people express their interest in traveling, within the state, we want to be as ready as possible and we look forward to partnering to ensure the reopening process is successful.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Todd Davidson  
CEO, Travel Oregon