

Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT)

April 9th, 2026 | 3-5pm | Hybrid

In-Person

ODOT Region 4 Headquarters, Building M, Baney Conference Room (63055 N Hwy 97, Bend, OR 97701)

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AGENDA

- | | | |
|------|--|--|
| 3:00 | <u>1. Call to Order & Introductions</u> | <i>Chair/Vice Chair</i> |
| 3:10 | <u>2. Public Comment</u> | <i>Chair/Vice Chair</i> |
| 3:15 | <u>3. COACT Business</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">ACTION: Approve February Meeting Minutes | <i>Chair/Vice Chair</i>
Attachment A
February 2026 Meeting Minutes |
| 3:30 | <u>4. COACT/ODOT Capital Investment Plan</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">CIP Project prioritization | <i>COACT Chairs</i> |
| 4:20 | <u>5. US 97 Safety Initiative & Letter of Support</u> | Commissioner Taylor |
| 4:40 | <u>6. Roundtable Updates/Sharing</u> | <i>COACT Members</i> |
| 5:00 | <u>7. Adjourn</u> | <i>Chair/Vice Chair</i> |

Next Meeting:

Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT)

Meeting Minutes - February 12th, 2026 | 3-5pm | Hybrid

In-Person

ODOT Region 4 Headquarters, Building M, Baney Conference Room (63055 N Hwy 97, Bend, OR 97701)

Chair: Commissioner Patti Adair

Members Present: Commissioner Taylor, David Roth, Mayor Jennifer Letz, Brian Potwin, Councilor Ariel Mendez, Councilor John Neilson, Councilor Tryna Muilenburg, Emerald Shirley, Councilor Scott Smith, Bob Townsend, Jeff Everly, Commissioner Hermreck

Others Present: Ken Shonkwiler, Joel McCarrol, Brenda Gessner, Chris Doty, Casey Kaiser, Tarik Rawlings, Commissioner Chang, Jessica MacClanahan.

MINUTES

3:00 1. Call to Order & Introductions

Chair/Vice Chair

Commissioner Adair called the meeting to order at 3:00PM

3:10 2. Public Comment

Chair/Vice Chair

3:15 3. COACT Business

Chair/Vice Chair

- ACTION: Approve November Meeting Minutes

Attachment A

November 2025 Meeting Minutes

- Letter of Support – BUILD US DOT Grant – US 97 Juniper Butte Safety Improvements

Motion to Approve Minutes

Motion: Seth Taylor

Second: Mayor Letz

Motion to Submit Letter of Support for US 97 BUILD Grant Submission

Motion: Commission Taylor for \$20,150,000

Second: Councilor Muilenburg

3:30 4. COACT/ODOT Capital Investment Plan

Ken Shonkwiler/COACT Chairs

- ODOT CIP Presentation
- COACT project submission discussion (5 minutes per member agency)
- CIP Project prioritization

Ken Shonkwiler provided an overview of the CIP and a discussion on priorities within COACT.

City of sisters provided an overview of the projects submitted – safety improvements on US 20, a roundabout on US 20/OR 126, and wildlife crossings on Hwy 20. Mayor Lentz asked for a traffic study on US 20.

Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT)

Commissioner Hermreck provided an overview of the OR 126/Powell Butte project. She stressed the need for interim improvements from ODOT in addition to the roundabout construction on this section of OR 126.

Councilor Mendez stated that safety was the highest priority for the City of Bend. Outside of Bend, US 97 La Pine to Madras should be the highest priority. He gave an overview of the safety data that he analyzed, as well as the projects included on the City of Bend submittal. US 20 on Greenwood is a safety improvement project, as well as the US 97/Reed Market Traffic Signal. Cross jurisdictional problems are some of the highest needs.

Commissioner Taylor pointed out that safety on US 97 is of the highest need, deaths have been too frequent on US 97. US 97 needs to be brought up to standard and anticipated need. Commissioner Hermreck applauded Councilor Mendez for pointing out safety as a high priority outside of their own jurisdiction. Commissioner Taylor and Commissioner Chang are working on funding a mega project on US 97 to improve safety.

City of Prineville and Councilor Smith submitted the 3rd street corridor project on US 26 to improve pavement condition. Sidewalk infill and new pavement is needed on US 26. The project has some design work completed. Downtown is needed to be finished.

City of Metolius: Councilor Mullenberg agrees that the main goal should be on Hwy 97. The city submitted several pedestrian crossing projects on OR 361.

City of Redmond: Councilor Neilson agreed that US 97 should be a priority. OR 126/35th is a high need in the city – needed for children crossing OR 126. Hwy 97 in the south part of Redmond is in poor shape. City of Redmond staff further discussed reasons why OR 126/35th and also discussed why new interchanges on the north and south end of town are needed. US 97/O'Neil and a southern interchange on US 97 south of Yew are both high needs.

Commissioner Taylor asked if there is a way to think of these projects and prioritize projects based on saving lives.

David Roth (BPAC) mentioned that the US 20/US 97 connection would provide high benefit to congestion on Empire. He also noted that bicycle and pedestrian projects are of utmost importance and people who walk and bike do not have the same rights as vehicles. Low hanging fruit would be crosswalks and bicycle projects. Bicycles should have the same rights as vehicles and may need changes from a legislative and funding aspect. Signage should be improved for pedestrian crosswalks.

Chris Doty from Deschutes County let the group know that the county is submitted a congressionally directed spending request for OR 126/35th and OR 126/Hemholtz. A BUILD grant is also being submitted to serve Deschutes River Woods for design.

COACT requested that US 97 projects are highlighted and brought to the top.

4:20 **5. 27-30 STIP Outreach**

Emerald Shirley

Emerald provided an overview of the 27-30 STIP outreach. Public comment period is currently open until early March.

Councilor Mendez made the comment that Central Oregon and Bend did not score well in the Great Streets process. Emerald clarified that we have received two Great Streets applications but were within SCOACT.

Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT)

4:40 **6. Roundtable Updates/Sharing**

COACT Members

Chris Doty, Deschutes County:

BPAC:

Mayor Jennifer Letz, City of Sisters: City is still investing in the alternate route for US 20.

Commissioner Adair, Deschutes County:

Commissioner Seth Taylor, Jefferson County: Central Oregon Counties are coordinating to have a united front to have a US 97 mega project and will be reaching out for signatures to local agencies in Central Oregon.

Emerald Shirley, ODOT

Councilor John Nielson, City of Redmond: Redmond Airport is redoing parking system and will have license plate reading software. Cascade East Transit has opened applications for their advisory committee.

Councilor Tryna Muilenberg, City of Metolius:

Councilor David Beck, City of Culver:

Councilor Mendez, City of Bend: City of Bend is working on Standards and Specifications for roadways in the City of Bend. City has set a zero fatality goal and a 10% reduction in all crashes over ten years. Also working on TSAP with BMPO. Bend City Council is also stopping the use of Flock Cameras due to privacy concerns.

Rich Evans, City of Prineville:

Councilor Scott Smith, City of Prineville:

Commissioner Susan Hermreck, Crook County: Councilor Hermreck made a comment about ODOT staff asking people in Crook County to remove signs.

Brian Potwin, Commute Options: Currently collaborating with TSO program and COIC to work on safety outreach. Work with safe routes to school is ongoing and additional grants in the City of Bend.

Jeff Every: US 97 is a priority for the trucking industry and needs additional funding for allocation.

Bob Townsend, CET: CET has committee openings for PTAC and STIF funds for transit. CET has also re-implemented fares.

Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT)

5:00 **7. Adjourn**

Chair/Vice Chair

Meeting was adjourned at 5:02PM by Commissioner Adair

Next Meeting: April 9th, 2026

ACT Name: COACT

Top Priority Investments								
	Name	Description	Urgency (select from drop down and describe)		Regional Significance (describe)	OTC Priorities (select from drop down and describe)		Other Information
1	US 97/OR 361 Intersection Improvement	Install intersection safety improvement from the US 97 High Bridge to Madras Safety Study	High	One of the highest crash locations in the US 97 High Bridge to Madras Safety Study	US 97 is a critical north-south route in Central Oregon and the location has a history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Safety	Project will reduce history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Has been before the MAC and has had planning completed.
2	US 97: Veterans Way-SW Yew Avenue (Redmond) Project	from Veteran's Way to Yew Ave, replace existing signals at US97/Odem Medo & US97/Veterans, new signals at US97/Quartz, US97/Pumice, US97/Wickiup, and US97/Rutch, raised median at Wickiup and intersection modification at all	High	Pavement condition has deteriorated significantly. Signal work could be phased.	US 97 is the main north-south arterial in Central Oregon	State of Good Repair	Pavement is state of good repair. Signals and median are safety	Project is identified in US 97 South Redmond Facility Plan and has been scoped by ODOT Region 4.
3	US 97 Traversable Median Improvements	Install traversable median on US 97 from US 97/US 26/Colfax Lane to US 97/Dover Lane intersection.	High	Important operational and safety improvement	US 97 is a critical north-south route in Central Oregon and the location has a history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Safety	Project will reduce history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Has been before the MAC and has had planning completed.
4	US20/Empire/US97	Install new traffic signal at US20/Empire. Install WB right-turn lane on Empire at US20. Install traffic signal at US97/Empire SB ramp intersection. Improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities across/through the interchange. Planning and conceptual design for a direct southbound US20 to southbound US97 connection.	High	This project will improve mobility and safety for all users at one of the most congested and high-crash interchanges in Region 4.	These projects will improve access to the large regional employment center on Empire Avenue, the regional retail centers north and south of the interchange, and access to rapidly developing residential lands across northern areas of Bend.	Safety	These projects will improve safety and mobility by eliminating an uncontrolled intersection (97 SB on-ramp), replacing an aging traffic signal, and improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities.	Projects are supported by local and ODOT Plans.
5	Intersection of Powell Butte Hwy and Hwy 126	Install a roundabout to improve connectivity and reduce crashes at the intersection of Powell Buttee Hwy and Hwy 126. This solution also can reduce the likelihood of crashes	High	This intersection is a known safety and congestion concern on OR 126, which serves as a primary east-west route through Crook County. This improvement will address conflict points and improve traffic flow	Improvements at this intersection benefit local commuters, freight and ag traffic and regional travel through Central and Eastern Oregon	Safety	This project directly advances safety and mobility outcomes by reducing crash risk, improving intersection performance and enhancing reliability on a state highway	Project is supported by ODOT and Crook County TSP
Other Priority Investments								
(List projects here that are reasonably likely, not in any prioritized order)								
Agency	Name	Description	Urgency (select from drop down and describe)		Regional Significance (describe)	OTC Priorities (select from drop down and describe)		Other Information
Jefferson County	US 97/OR 361 Intersection Improvement	Install intersection safety improvement from the US 97 High Bridge to Madras Safety Study	High	One of the highest crash locations in the US 97 High Bridge to Madras Safety Study	US 97 is a critical north-south route in Central Oregon and the location has a history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Safety	Project will reduce history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Has been before the MAC and has had planning completed.
Jefferson County	US 97/US 26/ Intersection Improvement	Install roundabout from US 97 High Bridge to Madras Safety Study	High	Important operational and safety improvement	US 97 is a critical north-south route in Central Oregon and the location has a history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Safety	Project will reduce history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Has been before the MAC and has had planning completed.

Jefferson County	US 97 Traversable Median Improvements	Install traversable median on US 97 from US 97/US 26/Colfax Lane to US 97/Dover Lane intersection.	High	Important operational and safety improvement	US 97 is a critical north-south route in Central Oregon and the location has a history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Safety	Project will reduce history of fatal and serious injury crashes	Has been before the MAC and has had planning completed.
City of Redmond	US 97: Veterans Way-SW Yew Avenue (Redmond) Project	Scope includes full depth reconstruction of US97 from Veteran's Way to Yew Ave, replace existing signals at US97/Odem Medo & US97/Veterans, new signals at US97/Quartz, US97/Pumice, US97/Wickiup, and US97/Rutch, raised median at Wickiup and intersection modification at all signals to allow for future u-turn needs, conduit throughout the corridor for future ITS network communications and illumination, new sidewalks and a cycle track through the corridor, ADA upgrades and installation where there are current gaps, stormwater facilities upgrades within the corridor, sign upgrades	High	Pavement condition has deteriorated significantly	US 97 is the main north-south arterial in Central Oregon	State of Good Repair		Project is identified in US 97 South Redmond Facility Plan and has been scoped by ODOT Region 4.
City of Redmond	US 97 Redmond Southern Interchange	Redmond's TSP and the updated regional Bend-Redmond travel demand model identify growth in southeast Redmond that exceeds the capacity of the existing Yew Ave Interchange. A new interchange is needed to meet the growth projections and provide an alternate route to the already congested South Highway 97, a significant regional facility.	Medium	Southeast Redmond is currently experiencing new development interest and better clarity on a regional transportation solution will allow for better developer mitigation to be conditioned.	The South Redmond Tract, a Regionally Significant Infrastructure Site, is 700 acres of large lot industrial lands in Southeast Redmond that will create regional jobs. A comprehensive plan for a southern interchange will better inform developer impacts and long-range transportation planning.	Safety	This project will better meet the regional demand on US 97 between Bend and Redmond and allow more efficient use of dollars for already failing US 97 intersections through Redmond	Project is supported by Redmond TSP and DSL Infrastructure Master Plan (ODOT, City, County stakeholders) A new interchange south of Yew will require planning documents to be completed such that initial planning, land use, and funding applications can be completed. An Alternatives Analysis or IAMP will allow those initial planning processes to commence and would be a productive and realistic first step.
City of Redmond	US 97/O'Neil Junction Interchange	Install a new interchange at US 97/O'Neil Junction to improve safety and connectivity to/from US 97.	Medium	This project is necessary to meet current growth in north Redmond. Additionally, a new interchange would alleviate current capacity deficiencies on US 97 by providing an alternate route to local arterials.	As a regionally significant north-south route, capacity deficiencies on US 97 through Redmond would benefit the region as a whole.	Safety	This project will improve side-street access to US 97 and reduce the frequency of crashes at this intersection.	While this is a large regional undertaking, completing an IAMP for US 97/O'Neil Junction would be a productive and realistic first step.
City of Bend	US20/Empire/US97	Install new traffic signal at US20/Empire. Install WB right-turn lane on Empire at US20. Install traffic signal at US97/Empire SB ramp intersection. Improve pedestrian and bicycle facilities across/through the interchange. Planning and conceptual design for a direct southbound US20 to southbound US97 connection.	High	This project will improve mobility and safety for all users at one of the most congested and high-crash interchanges in Region 4.	These projects will improve access to the large regional employment center on Empire Avenue, the regional retail centers north and south of the interchange, and access to rapidly developing residential lands across northern areas of Bend.	Safety	These projects will improve safety and mobility by eliminating an uncontrolled intersection (97 SB on-ramp), replacing an aging traffic signal, and improving pedestrian and bicycle facilities.	Projects are supported by local and ODOT Plans.
City of Redmond	US 97 Galloway to Pershall (additionally funding for current barrier project requested)	Modify existing barrier project on US 97 from Galloway to Pershall to maintain two lanes in each direction of US 97.	High	Existing project will reduce a lane of travel on US 97 and modifying the existing project prior to construction completion would be less efficient and exacerbate regional travel on US 97.	US 97 north of Redmond is already a bottleneck and widening is a regional priority between Madras and Redmond.	Safety		In addition to increased capacity on US 97, safety will also increase when travelers can pass slower traffic without having to pass in an oncoming traffic lane.

City of Bend	US97/Reed Market Rd NB off-ramp traffic signal	Design and install traffic signal at NB off-ramp intersection.	Medium	This project will improve mobility and safety at a congested interchange.	The project will improve safety and access to the Old Mill District, Hayden Homes Amphitheater, the rapidly developing KorPine area, and businesses and residences throughout central and south Bend.	Safety	This project will improve mobility and safety by eliminating an uncontrolled intersection.	Project is supported by local and ODOT Plans.
City of Redmond	US 97/Antler Pedestrian Overcrossing	Install a pedestrian overcrossing of Antler Ave over US 97 to increase safety and provide usable pedestrain access at this intersection.	Medium	US 97 bisects Redmonds Downtown District and is a barrier to connectivity in a time of increased growth in the community.	There is a current at-grade, uncontrolled pedestrian crossing at this intersection, which requires four lanes of traffic on US 97 to stop and accommodate. US 97 is a significant regional facility with increasing demand and capacity constraints.	Safety	This project will improve safety and reduce potentially fatal vehicle-pedestrian crashes.	This project also increases mobility by providing an actually usable crossing for pedestrians, bikes, or those with disabilities.
City of Bend	US97 bike/ped overcrossing	Planning and conceptual design for bike/ped overcrossing of US97 in the Pinebrook/Badger vicinity	Medium	This project will improve mobility for people that live west of US97 and need to access the commercial services and employment areas east of US97. People walking, rolling and biking must currently cross US97 at-grade or travel out of direction to access safer crossings.	This project will improve access to existing commercial areas and employment areas for people living west of US97.	Safety	This project will improve safety and mobility for people living west of US97 that need to access commercial services and employment areas east of US97.	Project is supported by local and ODOT Plans.
City of Redmond	Highland/35th Traffic Signal	Install a traffic signal to improve connectivity and reduce crashes at Highland/35th. This solution also creates a safe pedestrian crossing.	High	A new Rec Center will be opening south of this intersection in Summer 2026, which will increase demand and introduce safety concerns at this intersection. Additionally, more pedestrian traffic is anticipated due to the proximity of the new rec center.	Improving safety on OR 126, a critical east-west route in Central Oregon, is of great importance to the region and state.	Safety	This project will improve side-street access to OR 126 and reduce the frequency of crashes at this intersection.	Project is supported by locale and ODOT plans and priorities.
City of Redmond	Helmholtz/OR 126 Roundabout	Install a roundabout to improve connectivity and reduce crashes at Helmholtz/OR 126. This solution also creates a safe and effective transition to the urban environment as motorists enter Redmond city limits.	High	New development is increasing both north and south of OR 126 on Helmholtz and safety improvments are needed due to crash history at the intersection.	Improving safety on OR 126, a critical east-west route in Central Oregon, is of great importance to the region and state.	Safety	This project will improve side-street access to OR 126 and reduce the frequency of crashes at this intersection.	Project is supported by locale and ODOT plans and priorities.
Crook County	Intersection of Powell Butte Hwy and Hwy 126	Install a roundabout to improve connectivity and reduce crashes at the intersection of Powell Buttee Hwy and Hwy 126. This solution also can reduce the likelihood of crashes	High	This intersection is a known safety and congestion concern on OR 126, which serves as a primary east-west route through Crook County. This improvement will address conflict points and improve traffic flow	Improvements at this intersection benefit local commuters, freight and ag traffic and regional travel through Central and Eastern Oregon	Safety	This project directly advances safety and mobility outcomes by reducing crash risk, improving intersection performance and enhancing reliability on a state highway	Project is supported by ODOT and Crook County TSP
City of Sisters	US 20 Safety Improvements	Initiate traffic and speed study for reduced speed, turn lanes, and crosswalk at US 20 between Mp 1 and intersection between US20 and OR 126. Add wildlife fencing at the City's Lazy Z property.	Medium		Improves safety for motorists and pedestrians along a stretch of roadway that has increased activity and is a popular wildlife passage.	Safety		Local support and coincides with future city projects

City of Sisters	HWY 20 Wildlife Crossings	Construct high priority wildlife crossings between Sisters and Suttle Lake.	Medium		Improves safety for motorists and wildlife by constructing crossings at the highest density of deer and elk vehicle collisions in the State.	Safety		Feasibility Study completed. Four sites identified between Sisters and Suttle Lake.
City of Sisters	US 20 / 126 Roundabout	Begin planning and design work for the future roundabout at the intersection of US 20 and OR 126.	Medium		Improved mobility and safety at the intersection of two key regional routes.	Mobility		Project included in local TSP
City of Bend	US20 (Greenwood and 3rd St) bicycle and pedestrian improvements	Construct bicycle and pedestrian improvements on Greenwood identified in the US20 Bend Facility Plan and on 3rd St from Greenwood to Butler Market Rd. Improvements include additional protected crossings, enhanced bicycle facilities, and multi-use trails.	High	This project will improve mobility and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists along a congested, high-crash, and high-fatality corridor. Over half of each corridor is within a potential Climate Friendly Area (CFA). Implementing these projects will improve multi-modal access throughout the corridor.	These projects will improve access to existing commercial and employment areas, the Core Area, potential CFAs on Greenwood Ave and 3rd Street, and rapidly developing lands south and east of the Greenwood corridor.	Safety	These projects will improve mobility and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists by providing protected crossings and improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities along two of the highest crash and fatality corridors within Bend.	Projects are supported by local and ODOT plans.
City of Prineville	US 26/Third Street Corridor Paving & Streetscape Improvements	Revitalize the US 26/Third Street corridor from the intersection of Deer Street to the intersection of NE Elm Street through full reconstruction and repaving of the roadway, reconstruction of midblock sidewalks bringing them compliant with ADA and pedestrian safety standards, and installation of midblock lighting.	High	This project was slated to be completed in 2017 in conjunction with ODOT ADA improvements when the City received \$3 million from HB 2017. Costs increased during the design phase and the scope of work was reduced, eliminating the critical pavement upgrades and pedestrian improvements. The infrastructure is in urgent need of these critical improvements.	The US 26/Third Street corridor is a critical east-west route (including for freight) in Central Oregon, with importance to the region and state.	State of Good Repair	This project will improve the condition of US 26/Third Street for motorized traffic as well as improve pedestrian safety and ADA accessibility.	The City of Prineville and ODOT employ a collaborative partnership for the management and maintenance of the US 26/Third Street corridor, with both entities facing funding challenges in completing this project. The design phase has been completed and the project is construction-ready once funding is available.
City of Metolius	Culver Highway Crosswalk Improvements	Crosswalk improvements at the following location: Jefferson/Dover lane (2 crosswalks), Jefferson Ave/4th st., Jefferson Ave/6th st., Jefferson Ave/9th st. Crosswalks include varying levels of improvement and may consider RFB's, ADA ramps, illumination, signing, or other improvements.	High	Pedestrian improvements will increase safety for children accessing schools and improve traffic calming	The route through Metolius along the Culver Highway is commonly used to avoid the dangers of Highway 97. There is currently only one crosswalk on Jefferson Ave. within the city.	Safety	Project will improve active transportation safety.	Project is supported by local and ODOT Plans.

Make US 97 Safer - Our Lives Depend on It

US 97, a thoroughfare for economic development and connecting the State of Oregon, is one of the most dangerous highways in our state. While HB 2017 supported some significant interchange and lane addition projects in select urban areas, those projects are largely complete now. ODOT has very limited discretionary funding to invest in STIP projects to make further improvements. For example, in the most recent three-year STIP cycle ODOT was only able to add 3 miles of passing lanes along US 97's 290 mile length.

The importance of this highway cannot be overstated. Not only is it a lifeline for commerce and our citizens, it is the most important highway in terms of state resiliency in the event of the Cascadia event or another catastrophic earthquake.

A coalition of leaders in Deschutes County, Klamath County, and Jefferson County urge the Joint Committee on Transportation and the Ways and Means Sub-Committees on Transportation and on Public Safety to make US 97 safety a top investment priority in 2026 and 2027. Once funds are available, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Oregon State Police (OSP) should implement safety improvements and operations immediately.

Why We Must Act Now

Each year US 97 is the site of a large number of fatal and serious injury crashes. This number is increasing as the population of Central and South Central Oregon grows and as more freight and travelers choose this route. Each fatal and serious injury crash devastates families and burdens emergency services, law enforcement, and hospitals. Residents plead for improvements, echoing a broader crisis:

- US 97 had 77 fatal crashes statewide over five years (2016–2020), with 25 in 2020—making it the state's second deadliest road.
- Between 2018 and 2022, US 97 saw 97 deaths in 3,461 crashes
- 57.5% of fatal Oregon crashes happen on rural highways, including US 97.
- US 97's daily traffic is projected to exceed 20,000 vehicles by 2044, raising the risk for all travelers.
- From May 2023 to May 2025, DMV records show 17 fatalities along Klamath County's 120-mile stretch of US 97.
- The US 97 corridor between Madras and Bend ranks in the top 5% of dangerous road segments in Oregon.

The Safety Improvements We Need

Designated Safety Corridors in other parts of Oregon provide useful principles for planning safety improvements on US 97. The key tools used by Safety Corridor projects are: Engineering, (Law) Enforcement, Education, and Emergency Response. Our requests to the Legislature primarily focus on Engineering, Law Enforcement and Education tools. Our Counties will work to enhance Emergency Response separately.

Engineering

We seek to partner with ODOT to make critical infrastructure improvements to US 97, including:

- Developing **median barriers or traversable medians** in frequent head-on collision and left turn onto highway sections
- Strategically adding and connecting **passing lanes and additional lanes** in areas of high congestion and dangerous passing activity
- **Widening shoulders** in key areas
- Redesign and construction of **dangerous intersections**
- Installing **shoulder and center line rumble strips and recessed pavement markers** to reduce lane deviations
- Developing **Clear Zone improvements** to reduce the probability and severity of roadway departures
- Implementing **best practices and technology** to assist enforcement and improve safety, such as the expanded use of variable speed limits, radar speed enforcement, and other emerging tools and technologies.

Once safety improvements have been made to US 97, adequate ongoing maintenance and preservation of the improved highway is also essential to safety.

Law Enforcement

More state troopers or other law enforcement officers could help to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes in key sections of US 97. Increased highway patrol presence could help manage dangerous driver behaviors such as speeding, distracted driving, DUII, and aggressive or unsafe passing. In some areas, improvements in traffic control signage would be appropriate to combine with increased law enforcement presence.

The Oregon State Police are supported by the state General Fund and appropriations are managed by the Public Safety Ways and Means Sub-committee. Prior to 1980 funding for OSP came from the State Highway Fund. Citation revenue goes to the General Fund to prevent OSP from having perverse incentives to issue lots of citations. We must consider

moving beyond this philosophical and outdated funding barrier. In order for OSP to be able to provide expanded patrol on US 97 changes to this funding system may be needed.

Education

A Safety Corridor approach relies upon the ability to influence driver behavior as well as adapt to changes that the Engineering and Enforcement activities have implemented. Education, in a variety of forms and approaches, will be necessary to inform and supplement the safety investment in the US 97 corridor.

Request For Legislative Action

We request swift, effective action from the legislature to help reverse the tide of preventable losses on US 97. We have some of the most dangerous road segments in the State along US 97. In more rural areas where emergency response can be delayed the safety improvements we are seeking are even more critical.

There are numerous ways that the Legislature could make funding available to implement infrastructure upgrades, however it will take innovative bi-partisan work to develop viable funding strategies. Identifying funding to expand OSP presence on US 97 and beyond will also require creative problem solving. We hope to work with you to develop those creative bi-partisan solutions and stand ready to assist in whatever ways we can.



Make US 97 Safer - Our Lives Depend on It

US 97, a thoroughfare for economic development and connecting the State of Oregon, is one of the most dangerous highways in our state. While HB 2017 supported some significant interchange and lane addition projects in select urban areas, those projects are largely complete now. ODOT has very limited discretionary funding to invest in STIP projects to make further improvements. For example, in the most recent three-year STIP cycle ODOT was only able to add 3 miles of passing lanes along US 97's 290 mile length.

The importance of this highway cannot be overstated. Not only is it a lifeline for commerce and our citizens, it is the most important highway in terms of state resiliency in the event of the Cascadia event or another catastrophic earthquake.

A coalition of leaders in Deschutes County, Klamath County, and Jefferson County urge the Joint Committee on Transportation and the Ways and Means Sub-Committees on Transportation and on Public Safety to make US 97 safety a top investment priority in 2026 and 2027. Once funds are available, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and Oregon State Police (OSP) should implement safety improvements and operations immediately.

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- Strategically adding and connecting **passing lanes and additional lanes** in areas of high congestion and dangerous passing activity
- **Widening shoulders** in key areas
- Redesign and construction of **dangerous intersections**
- Installing **shoulder and center line rumble strips and recessed pavement markers** to reduce lane deviations
- Developing **Clear Zone improvements** to reduce the probability and severity of roadway departures
- Implementing **best practices and technology** to assist enforcement and improve safety, such as the expanded use of variable speed limits, radar speed enforcement, and other emerging tools and technologies.

Once safety improvements have been made to US 97, adequate ongoing maintenance and preservation of the improved highway is also essential to safety.

Law Enforcement

More state troopers or other law enforcement officers could help to reduce the frequency and severity of crashes in key sections of US 97. Increased highway patrol presence



could help manage dangerous driver behaviors such as speeding, distracted driving, DUII, and aggressive or unsafe passing. In some areas, improvements in traffic control signage would be appropriate to combine with increased law enforcement presence.

The Oregon State Police are supported by the state General Fund and appropriations are managed by the Public Safety Ways and Means Sub-committee. Prior to 1980 funding for OSP came from the State Highway Fund. Citation revenue goes to the General Fund to prevent OSP from having perverse incentives to issue lots of citations. We must consider moving beyond this philosophical and outdated funding barrier. In order for OSP to be able to provide expanded patrol on US 97 changes to this funding system may be needed.

Education

A Safety Corridor approach relies upon the ability to influence driver behavior as well as adapt to changes that the Engineering and Enforcement activities have implemented. Education, in a variety of forms and approaches, will be necessary to inform and supplement the safety investment in the US 97 corridor.

Thank you for your consideration.

The Jefferson County Board of Commissioners

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mark Wunsch".

Mark Wunsch
Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Seth Taylor".

Seth Taylor
Vice-chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kelly Simmelink".

Kelly Simmelink
Commissioner

The Deschutes County Board of Commissioners

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Phil Chang".

Phil Chang
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony DeBone".

Anthony DeBone
Vice-chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patti Adair".

Patti Adair
Commissioner

The Klamath County Board of Commissioners

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kelley Minty".

Kelley Minty
Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Derrick DeGroot".

Derrick DeGroot
Vice-chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andy Nichols".

Andy Nichols
Commissioner