

**September 3, 2026
9 a.m.-12 p.m. PST
ODOT Region 5 Headquarters
3012 Island Ave.
La Grande, OR
In-Person and virtual/Teams**

NEACT Board Meeting Minutes

Members and Alternates present:

Daniele Schuh, Aaron Palmquist, Tom Fellows, Tim Simons, Larry Wightman, Tim Helbig, Mavis Hartz, Noodle Perkins, Commissioner Paul Anderes, Kyle Carpenter, Barry Murphy, Commissioner Lisa Collier, Commissioner Michelle Kaseberg, Brandon Hammond, Steve Burkett, Dani Schulte, Jacob Cain, Commissioner Jeff Wenholtz.

Guests present:

Andy Perry, Steven Davis, Kim Curley, Kari Carper, John Doherty, Commissioner Jeff Baker, Wade Rynearson, Justin Walker, Blake Stone, Andy Lindsey, Brian McDowell.

ODOT Staff:

Ken Patterson, Sean Maloney, Michelle Owen, Vicki Moles, Sarah Morris, Ken Shonkwiler – presenter, Michelle Wright – presenter, Reyna Aguiar (ODOT), Tova Peltz (ODOT), Craig Romine – presenter, Jeff Biggerstaff – presenter, Rich Lani – presenter, Ace Clark – presenter.

Opening Meeting:

- 9:00 a.m. Commissioner Paul Anderes called the meeting to order.
- Roll call of voting members – Quorum present.
- Announcements: N/A.
- August minutes: Motion made by Tom Fellows to approve, Seconded by Mavis Hartz. Approved.

Public and/or Shareholders Comments:

Wildfire updates – ODOT District 12, District 13

- District 12 – Jeff Biggerstaff reported that D12 has responded to four established wildfires to support government firefighting services—North Cayuse Fire, North Dry Creek Fire, Paradise/Hagen Fire, and Rosenbaum Fire. D12 has also responded to 11 vegetation fires adjacent to state highways within the District. Since July 2026, D12 has logged approximately 630 hours responding to wildfires, with an estimated cost of \$87,748 to date. Jeff also noted the ongoing challenge of determining when

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to reopen roads for daily operations and community access versus keeping them closed to reduce vandalism risks and protect public safety.

- District 13 – Craig Romine reported that his crews have assisted local governments with two major wildfires, the Burnt Creek Fire and the Paradise/Hagen Fire. He rotated 10 employees throughout the entirety of the 10-day closure on Highway 204 over Tollgate, where crews were asked to pilot and flag traffic. Since July, his crews have logged 1,616 hours responding to wildfires, with an estimated total cost of \$38,972. Craig reported no current structural damage on the 204 highway from the fires but anticipates potential issues with erosion and falling burned trees. He also expressed concern regarding miscommunication and coordination surrounding the road closure. ODOT advocated for reopening the highway when possible, while fire crews requested the closure for safety reasons. It was determined that there were limited safety concerns on the highway itself and that delays in reopening were primarily related to communication and fire-crew management. Road closures have significant economic impacts on local communities, workers, and commuters. Improved communication and coordination between fire crews and ODOT will be needed to better evaluate safety concerns and reopen roads as soon as conditions safely allow.
- Ken Patterson – OTC- next meeting is September 9 and will include discussion of new reporting protocol requirements, project delivery check-ins, and delivery metrics to help inform decision-making. The OTC currently has 16 projects exceeding \$50 million and 3 projects exceeding \$250 million. Redistribution of federal funds that states are unable to spend within the required timeframe may be redistributed to other states. Approximately \$9 million is projected to be redistributed to Oregon this year, there is discussion about using the funds to subsidize the Abernethy Bridge and other highway bridge projects.

Presentations:

- Capital Investment Plan: Ken Shonkwiler, ODOT Capital Investment Plan Project Manager.
 - [Visit the CIP online open house through November 2.](#)
- Statewide Material Sources Update: Michelle Wright, ODOT Material Sources Program Manager.

Region Updates – Ken Patterson, Region 5, ODOT

- Recruitment for winter seasonal maintenance positions are underway with two ODF Fire & Ice employees returning here in Region 5.
- Ongoing growth and development continue to strain interchange capacity in Umatilla and Boardman. Congestion remains a significant issue, and the cost of necessary mitigation is too high for developers to absorb. Cost allocation for required improvements needs to be addressed. Nine locations are currently under study to establish an “infra-grant” to fund needed upgrades. The group is exploring options to

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match funds or identify new funding sources to move projects forward. Mitigation fees are the central challenge. The Immediate Opportunity Fund (IOF) through ODOT was mentioned as a potential resource to provide financial relief.

- Broadband right-of-way continues to be an active discussion. Because broadband is not classified as a utility, providers do not qualify for a utility permit, and the team is waiting on further guidance to finalize certain grants and establish clear guidelines for ODOT. Work is underway on an agreement to trade ODOT right-of-way in exchange for free fiber for ODOT, and legislative discussion on this is anticipated. There is also strong interest from power companies in using freeways for powerlines, companies are wanting to locate lines directly within the freeway. Operational needs remain a concern, and Ken is working on policy for upcoming legislative consideration.
- Region 5 chip seal projects are complete, and crews are currently working on shoulder and culvert cleanup to prepare for winter.

Current Construction Projects – Sean Maloney, Area Manager, ODOT

- Current and upcoming projects for 2026 include:
 - [Tower Road Interchange Bridge over I-84](#). Project Complete.
 - [I-84: Eastern Oregon Durable Striping](#). Project Complete.
 - [I-84: Rieth Interchange and Umatilla River Bridges](#) is underway.
 - [I-84 Roadway Illumination Project](#). Project Complete.
 - [OR 11 chip seal](#). Highway striping remains with expectations to be completed mid-Sept. (Now completed as of Sept. 22).
 - [I-84: Bridges over North Spruce Street \(La Grande\)](#) is underway.
 - OR 86 Guardrail Project is complete.

Local Projects – Michelle Owen, Local Agency Liaison, Region 5, ODOT

- Region 5 has 6 Small City Allotment grants that are out for agreement signature.
- Local Bridge has reached out to Region 5 for eligibility of bridge funding.
- The Columbia Development Authority HB2017 project is in the process of close-out, leaving one remaining HB2017 project in Region 5-Hermiston's N 1st Place.

City/County/Tribal/Transit Updates – City/County/Tribal/Transit Representatives

City updates

- Bike and Ped – Mavis Hart shared that wildfires have made for a difficult biking/walking season this summer, despite this the biking community is still on the rise. School is back in session with an emphasis on using and creating safe routes to school. An Emergency Medical Technician training will be held in LaGrande this fall.

Confederated tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR)

- Dani Schulte reported that the Tribes currently have three road-related positions open for recruitment: Transportation Manager, Roads Manager, and Kayak Fleet Manager.

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County updates

- Umatilla County – Tom Fellows reports that the county has been focused on clean up and road closures due to wildfires. They have had a productive year that included some striping of county roads.
- Wallowa County – Commissioner Lisa Collier and Larry Wightman both shared their gratitude and satisfaction with the collaboration of Umatilla County to complete Wallowa County's chip seal project. The project was completed in time for the county to accomplish some maintenance projects to prepare for winter.
- Baker County – Noodle Perkins reports that Baker County has had 100 days of significant fire response. The county has been grading roads for fire crews, sharing equipment, and working with the Forest Service on reimbursement for services.

Sean Maloney for Angie Jones-ODOT Public Transportation

- STIF formula applications are now open. Qualified entries have received their 27-29 allocation estimates and have started sharing subrecipient applications to their providers.
- STIF Intercommunity applications are being scored internally, and we anticipate having decisions made within the next few months. Thank you to NEACT/SEACT for ranking the projects.
- 5310/5311 formula applications have been passing through the fatal flaw review process, Region 5 has done well on their applications.
- Umatilla County and Kayak are working with a consultant regarding forming a Council of Governments specifically for transit, The work is in the planning states and going well.
- CTUIR/Kayak has applied for 5339 (b) funds for construction of their transit facility in Hermiston.
- CCNO, Union/Baker/Wallowa counties and Morrow County will be working with ODOT PTO and a consultant paid through 5304 funds to update their Coordinated Human Services Transportation Plan. This plan is required in order to apply for Federal grants and must be updated every 5 years. Kaya/CTUIR completed their updated plan in 2025. Umatilla County's update will be completed by the end of 2026.
- I-84 Project provider, Northwestern Stage Lines. The route is doing very well. Ridership and revenue have increased over fifty percent since December 15, 2025. Transit providers report that NWSL bus drivers are very professional, polite, respectful and easy to work with. They also report that they have not had any negative interactions with NWSL. NWSL connects with all the public transit providers on the route. Their current 511(f) grant will be extended until December 31, 2027.
- The regional public transit website will be up and running soon. Passengers will be able to go to one website where all providers in Region 5 are located with routes, fares, and all the information they would need to plan travel.

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Suggested Agenda Items for next meeting: Legislative issues surrounding ODOT.

The next meeting is scheduled for November 5, 2026.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:39 a.m. PST.

Respectfully submitted, Vicki Moles, R5 Community Affairs Specialist.