

HISTORIC COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY AND HISTORIC COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY STATE TRAIL HISTORY

The Historic Columbia River Highway was the first modern highway constructed in the Pacific Northwest and the first scenic highway in the United States. Construction started in Multnomah County in 1913 and finished in The Dalles in 1922, a distance of 73 miles. Beginning in the 1950s, ODOT constructed a new two-lane water-level highway which was eventually widened and became Interstate 84. Unfortunately, the Historic Highway was severed in numerous locations during Interstate construction.

Subsequent to the passage of the Scenic Area Act in 1986, ODOT along with partner agencies started to reconnect the drivable portions of the Historic Columbia River Highway as the new Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail. Work continues today on this recreation trail for pedestrians and bicyclists. When fully completed, the State Trail will extend approximately 22 miles in three sections: Bonneville, Shellrock-Mitchell Point, and Mosier Twin Tunnels sections. These sections connect to drivable portions of the Historic Highway and, when completed, will allow bicyclists to ride from Troutdale to The Dalles without riding on the unprotected shoulder of Interstate 84.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY

There are a number of Federal and State legislative actions that guide development of the Historic Columbia River Highway and Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail.

Federal Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act (1986)

“ODOT shall...undertake efforts to preserve and restore the continuity and historic integrity of the remaining segments of the Old Columbia River Highway for public use as a Historic Road, including recreation trails to connect intact and usable segments.”

Oregon State Senate Bill 766 (1987) Section 2

“The Legislative Assembly declares that it is the public policy of the State of Oregon to preserve and restore the continuity and historic integrity of the remaining segments of the Historic Columbia River Highway for public use and enjoyment and in furtherance thereof:

- (1) To reuse and manage the Historic Columbia River Highway as a continuous visitor attraction that ties together Columbia Gorge communities and rural service centers and contributes to their economic development*
- (2) To rehabilitate, restore, maintain and preserve all original roadway and highway-related structures on the intact and usable highway segments*
- (3) To connect intact and usable highway segments with recreation trails, where feasible, to create a continuous historic road route through the Columbia Gorge which links local, state and federal recreation and historic sites*
- (4) To provide a coordinated visitor information program to identify and interpret the significance of the highway*
- (5) To preserve and enhance the scenic quality of the highway and its associated corridor*



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(6) To coordinate appropriate state agency activities and funds to accomplish these purposes”

Section 3

(1)” The Department of Transportation shall prepare and manage a historic road program in consultation with the Historic Columbia River Highway Advisory Committee and other affected entities consistent with the...Act... [and]...section 2...”

Section 4

(1)”There is created in the Department of Transportation an advisory committee to advise the Director of Transportation and the Oregon Transportation Commission on policy matters pertaining to the preservation and restoration of the Historic Columbia River Highway”

(4)”The committee shall review proposed highway-related activities and other public actions, except for routine highway maintenance, which may affect the historic integrity, continuity, scenic values, public access and public recreational opportunities within the Columbia River Highway Historic District and submit recommendations to the director”

HISTORIC COLUMBIA RIVER HIGHWAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE VALUES

The following values guide how the Advisory Committee provides feedback to ODOT on transportation-related projects in the Columbia River Gorge.

Cultural History

We VALUE the rich history of those who came before us: the 9000 year history of Native American presence, the explorers and settlers who created the wagon roads, the industrialists who built the railroads and the visionaries whose idea of a scenic highway linking The Dalles and Portland. This rich history guides our VISION to preserve the highway and all of its historic features.

Design Sensitivity

We VALUE the timeless design of the artisan crafted rock walls, the graceful curves of the road and the artful bridges. We VALUE the designed landscape taking advantage of amazing vistas and showcasing the natural features of the Gorge. This design ethic, entrusted to us by Samuel Lancaster, guides our VISION for continuity and timeless design, lying lightly on the land.

Scenic Beauty

We VALUE the vistas, waterfalls and vegetation of the Gorge that allow us to escape the trappings of urban life. We VALUE the fish and wildlife that call this place home. This combined beauty of nature and wildlife guides our VISION to provide solitude and secret places yet to be discovered.

User Experience

We VALUE the experiences to be had by drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians alike, including their visits to the built attractions of Multnomah Falls Lodge and Vista House. We VALUE their access to USFS and OPRD lands, allowing for bird-watching, photography and hiking. These experiences guide our VISION to provide a safe and



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slow-paced intimacy for enjoying the spray of waterfalls, the smell of fresh air and the tree-lined canopies.

Partnerships

We VALUE partnerships formed with the many governmental entities in the Gorge. We VALUE the needs of Gorge communities for economic development and the fact that not everyone is a tourist. People also live along the highway. This focus guides our VISION to work in partnership to manage the Historic Columbia River Highway and Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail for the benefit of all users, to manage the number of visitors to optimize their experiences and to work with our neighbors so that all can share the beauty.

Connectivity

We VALUE the fact that the Historic Columbia River Highway functions as an accessible connective element for the Gorge communities. It may serve as a community's Main Street or it may function as a market road, bringing the Gorge's bounty to distant markets. This connectivity helps focus our VISION to continue to provide multimodal linkages to recreational opportunities, while providing needed community services and always connecting urban life with the solitude of the Gorge.

VISION STATEMENT 2017 – 2025

In 2017, the Historic Columbia River Highway Advisory Committee crafted and adopted the following vision statement:

1. Preserve, restore and maintain drivable portions of the Historic Columbia River Highway, including historic features, for slow-speed enjoyment of waterfalls, cliff faces, tree-lined “canopies”, colorful wildflower meadows, and open vistas. It is the journey, not the destination that matters.
2. Reconnect missing portions of the original highway with the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail, an accessible paved recreation trail open only to non-motorized use. As possible, integrate non-drivable remnants of the original highway into the State Trail.
3. Emulate the design sensitivity of Samuel Lancaster for all work along the Historic Columbia River Highway and along the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail. Take advantage of views, cultural artifacts, rock formations, creek crossings, significant trees and other natural features whenever undertaking physical improvements. Always use timeless design, quality materials and workmanship and remember to “lay lightly on the land.”
4. Provide a safe and positive visitor experience throughout the length of the Historic Highway and the Historic Columbia River State Trail between Troutdale and The Dalles. Given the expected population growth of the Portland – Vancouver metropolitan area, this may require limiting speeds, limiting access to certain attractions at specified times, encouraging alternative transportation modes, controlling and charging for parking, and



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encouraging visitors to start their Gorge experience from Portland or from one of the Gorge communities.

