

Historic Columbia River Highway



Advisory Committee Meeting

Meeting will be Online Only

Thursday, September 18, 2025

9 AM – 12 PM

Login online: <https://tinyurl.com/AC-Sept2025>

Meeting ID: 862 3999 7253

Password: HCRHAC

Call in (does not require internet): 1 (253) 215-8782

Meeting ID: # 862 3999 7253

Members

Arthur Babitz, Chair

Vacant

Ernie Drapela, Vice-Chair

Tricia Forsi

Mike Ballinger

Lisa Farquharson

Clay Courtright

Rian Windsheimer

Kate Baumgartner

Ian Johnson

Hood River County Representative

Hood River County Governor's Representative

Multnomah County Governor's Representative

Multnomah County Representative

Wasco County Representative

Wasco County Governor's Representative

Oregon Parks and Recreation Department

Oregon Department of Transportation

Travel Oregon

State Historic Preservation Office

Agenda

- | | |
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| 9:00 AM | Call to Order
Arthur Babitz |
| 9:05 AM | Opportunity for the public to comment on any item not on the agenda |
| 9:10 AM | Approval of Minutes
Arthur Babitz |
| 9:15 AM | Multnomah Falls Timed Use Permit End of Season Report
Terra Lingley, ODOT and Stephen Elgart, USFS |
| 9:30 AM | Bylaws Updates/Charter
All |
| 9:50 AM | New Member Welcome
All |

9:55 AM Historic Highway State Trail Updates

Perham to Mitchell Update

Terra Lingley, ODOT

Mitchell to Ruthton Phase 1 Update

Dave Arena, WFLHD and Terra Lingley, ODOT

10:25 AM Multnomah Falls Viaducts Update

Photos from Jack Carlson, WFLHD

10:40 AM ODOT Budget Update and Historic Highway Implications

Rian Windsheimer, ODOT

10:55 AM Larch Mountain Slide Emergency Project

Jason McNeil, ODOT

11:20 AM Updates

ODOT, Friends of the Historic Highway, OPRD, Travel Oregon, USFS, and WFLHD

11:45 AM Committee Round Table

All

12:00 PM Adjourn

Future Meetings

- December 18, 2025 Troutdale? Online only?

Topics:

- State Trail Mile Markers
- Cascade Locks Transportation System Plan TSP Update

Historic Columbia River Highway

Advisory Committee Meeting

Summary

September 18, 2025

Zoom only

Members Attending:	Arthur Babitz, chair Mike Ballinger, Wasco County Rian Windsheimer, ODOT Kate Baumgartner, Travel Oregon Lisa Farquharson, Wasco County Clay Courtright, OPRD Tricia Forsi
Historic Highway AC Staff:	Terra Lingley (ODOT) Kenny Werth (ODOT)
Others Attending:	Wayne Stewart, Member Emeritus Casey Gatz, USFS Clayton Davey, ODOT Jack Carlson, WLFHD Ithaca Jantzen, Experience Mt Hood and the Gorge Martin Hecht, Martin's Gorge Tours Dan Spatz, Wasco County Jason McNeil, ODOT Kaylee Crosby, Wildwood Tours Jennifer O'Donnell Kent Kalsch, ODOT Bonnie Clark Richard Alfieri Jeanette Kloos, FHCRH Jacob Anderson, City of The Dalles Lynn Burditt Dan Shanahan, ODOT AJ Zelada Kevin Greenwood, Port of Cascade Locks KOIN 971-235-1730

Call to Order

Arthur called to order the meeting at 9:02 a.m.

Public Comment

No Public Comment

New Member Introduction

Mike Ballinger introduced himself as the new Wasco County representative. He grew up in The Dalles and has since retired. He's a board member of the Friends of the Gorge and is excited about the Columbia River Highway and completing the State Trail.

Terra: Three governor appointees still needing to be approved, 1 returning and 2 new governor appointees. Hoping to be able to introduce new members at the December meeting.

Approval of minutes

Page 10 of meeting notes correct Jeanette Kloos' title and the Horseless Carriage group name edits.

Lisa made the motion to approve the minutes as amended, and Tricia seconded. Minutes were approved.

Multnomah Falls Timed Use Permits End of Season Report

Terra provided a summary of the timed use permit goals, noted that there were 930 timed use permits available per day (60 more per day than last year). There are 50 permits a day for in-person visitors, split between the Gateway to the Gorge Visitor Center in Troutdale, and the Cascade Locks Historical Museum. For the season, Troutdale issued 1,330 permits and Cascade Locks issued 308 permits. For in-person permits, Tuesday and Thursday were slightly busier than Friday, Monday, Wednesday, which is unexpected, usually weekends and Friday and Monday are peak days.

Stephen Elgart from USFS dug into the online pass permit data – this year there was an increase in permits purchased through rec.gov for a total of 87,787 permits issued this year, though there were still passes that were available and not purchased. It still hasn't slowed down in September after the permit season is complete. There were a record number of gate closures, folks can still be better educated on how to get passes. Forest Service is putting QR codes at all rec sites to go to rec.gov to get all kinds of passes.

Terra: We raised the limits on number of permits per hour and morning (9am) and evening (4 and 5 pm) hours still have permits available.

Terra: Columbia Gorge Express ridership has grown quite steadily over the past five years; CAT is happy with the ridership. This year, the number of trips was kept at 7 and riders per bus went up.

Stephen: Hopefully we can use placer.ai to get the numbers from that as well (Terra explained briefly that placer.ai is a data collection section that uses GPS pings to understand visitation and routing to destinations within the Gorge).

Terra: There has been steady growth in the number of riders per service hours on Columbia Gorge Express

Terra: Last year in August and September the gate closures were up. But this year gate closures have spiked with shorter full parking lot closures. We are trending towards similar amount of traffic to 2024. Some of this increased traffic at exit 31 can be attributed to the Historic Highway closures due to the Viaducts project.

Terra: 2025 curveballs were fewer than 2024 – currently the historic highway is closed from the Rowena Fire in June, and the Larch Mountain Slide construction that started on July 7.

QUESTIONS

Arthur Babitz: Can you talk about funding for Columbia Gorge Express?

Terra: Don't want to speak for CAT. They rely on Statewide Transit Investment Funding (STIF), they reapply every biennium. We can work with Amy and get that information.

Stephen: CAT was not awarded the grant for the Dog Mtn shuttle for this biennium.

Bylaws Updates/Charter

Terra: At the last meeting, we had a busy, red-lined version of the bylaw updates. Given the discussion we had at the last meeting, staff made additional edits and the updated version was included in the packet. One change is to refer to it as "Historic Highway" instead of "HCRH". Under Vision, deleted part of #4, focusing on keeping the high-level vision of #4. Replaced "citizen" with "community". Continued fine tuning of "members emeritus", how they're identified, how they engage during meetings, etc. Four meetings a year leaves the door open for additional meetings.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Arthur: One tiny issue with the term "blanks" under section 6 Meetings, I think it was meant to say "abstentions" not familiar with blanks. Does anyone else see that differently? (Kevin Greenwood agrees)

Arthur: In the emeritus section, there is no mention of a term. Calling that out so that people understand that emeritus positions that's how they work – it's an honorary position, so there is no end.

Wayne Stewart: On first page under Vision, Item #2, there is a paragraph that starts with the words "emulate the design sensitivities" there is a redundancy in the language. The last part of paragraph 2 should be deleted because it's covered in Item #3. The double text was deleted

Kate Baumgartner: So moved

Lisa: Seconded

Tricia Forsi: Thanks for doing this when I was out on leave!

Historic Highway State Trail Updates

Terra: WFLHD posted the bid opening of the construction for the Perham to Mitchell State Trail just yesterday. This includes bridges over both Perham and Mitchell Creeks. We are very excited to have that bid out. October 17 is the opening bid date, and the project is funded with \$7.9 million in FLAP grant and Congressionally Directed Spending funding. This is a year earlier than we thought for construction. If there is a successful bid, the plan is to go to construction at the end of this year, likely a year for construction. No traffic impacts on I-84, only shoulder closures. All of the work that impacted I-84 was done on previous project. We are quite confident that we will be able to start construction if we get appropriate bids

Terra: The design consultant has provided an updated fly through for Mitchell to Ruthton (Terra shared video). The state trail is nestled between Mitchell Point Dr and I-84. This will include a fully separated trail with new tunnel for pedestrians and cyclists. We'll be adding masonry fascia to the tunnel entrances (existing and new). We removed the bollard south of I-84 as it was a safety concern for cyclists and pedestrians. Inside, the tunnel will have graffiti resistant coating. We also added "Trail Ends" sign and Historic Highway sign. The trail will end at the service road and eventually the trail will connect into Hood River. Still fine tuning the boulders, landscaping on the north side of the tunnel.

Dan Spatz Question: No disruption to I84 traffic?

Terra: No, this section will have significant traffic impacts, the segment west of Mitchell Point tunnel that will go to construction at the end of this year doesn't have impacts. We did look at ways to not impact traffic.

QUESTIONS

Tricia: Is there a reason to not have a rock barrier on both sides of the tunnel? Can there be anything else to keep the trail safer?

Terra: No, maintenance crews need somewhere to plow the snow, and vehicles are not likely to make a sharp 90 degree turn to erroneously get onto the State Trail.

Tricia: If the pedestrians are higher than vehicles, then my concerns are much less.

Terra: The one-way drive, do not think that there should be a lot of concerns given the turn.

Mike Ballinger: Before Ruthton Point gets completed, will this be an eastside access to Mitchell Tunnel and what kind of parking issues might arise?

Terra: If folks are continuing eastbound, they should use the I-84 shoulder to head east. To head west, cyclists should use I-84, and then will take the service road to access the new tunnel. For the rest of the trail that still needs design and construction, at about 50% design. \$38-\$45 million to finish the section of trail.

AJ Zelada: Want to make sure that there is a light coating inside the tunnel to avoid the darkness in the Mitchell Point Tunnel. Anytime you have a tunnel, you want to have the most reflective surface.

Terra: The graffiti coating is clear, and no concrete coloring is proposed.

AJ Zelada [in chat]: Could use thermal signs, Bike Pad Only on Tunnel entrance from South

Multnomah Falls Viaducts Update

Terra: Overview of project. Construction started in Feb 2024; goes through June 2026. Traffic impacts single lane closure on viaducts starting May 16th to September 30th. West viaduct was closed from October 1, 2024 to May 2025. The east viaduct will be closed October 1, 2025 to May 2026. The east viaduct is twice as long as west viaduct. We are not widening either of the viaducts due to the historic nature of the highway. West viaduct is complete. White sealer material helps to protect the rail sections. The east viaduct railings were in much better shape, and the contractor has been adding the coating earlier than what happened on the west viaduct. While the east viaduct has been open to traffic, crews

are underneath doing the repair work. Concrete repair involves removing the damaged concrete and rebar and then patching (Terra shared several photos).

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Arthur: Believe that the viaduct restorations really take it back to its original form, it looks good.

Lynn Burditt [in chat]: I remember hearing about the Viaducts Repairs early in my tenure as Forest Supervisor (I started in 2012 😊)

ODOT Budget Update and Historic Highway Implications

Rian: Lots of challenges, we thought we were going to have some updates yesterday. The ODOT budget crisis has been going on for several years, we saw reduced maintenance level of service in the Gorge last cycle and that will continue with this “band-aid” funding package. It doesn’t restore funding to previous levels of service but back to last biennium. Without this funding package, we will be laying off 483 people in addition to hiring freeze and open positions.

Some important things to note: The House did pass a measure; the Senate was unable to act and now hopefully at the end of September. Even if the package passes, ODOT has been unable to hire winter seasonals and other maintenance positions. Hiring employees takes time, they must go through training procedures which means it’ll be middle of winter before those workers will be operating. ODOT workers have met with emergency responders in Hood River County to see how they were going to respond this winter.

Arthur: Can you give a little sharper edge on what the meaning of the “Band-aid” means for the Historic Highway project?

Rian: The federal funding wouldn’t be affected because it doesn’t require a match. All the services our maintenance folks provide will be at a lower level

Terra: I used to have a budget for wayfinding signs, plaques on structures, and medallions for the State Trail. Friends of the Historic Highway have stepped in to provide some of the funding. There is also some budget for meetings, unsure on if budget will be restored. Moving forward, will have to rely on Friends groups and partner agencies to buy physical things. Buying actual things with Federal Planning dollars is not allowed.

Arthur: When you have hiring freezes, etc. it tends to make things less strategic. For example, if people retire in one area, but that’s not where you would reduce positions.

Rian: As we moved into the current layoff situation, because of seniority and bumping, the positions that are affected are not under control of the Agency. Also, we cannot fill any new positions because it affects seniority. Until the layoffs are resolved, we can’t do any hiring.

Larch Mountain Slide Emergency Project

Jason McNeil, ODOT: Jason has been overseeing the ongoing emergency project, hoping to have it open next weekend. The slide is between the intersection of Larch Mountain Road and Vista House. This slide section has been an ongoing issue ever since the Historic Highway was built. Over time, Maintenance has continually patched and paved this section. For this fix, crews removed the existing wall that was

failing, dug down to solid ground, and added additional supports/anchors. Crews built the wall up and added additional drainage including perforated pipes. The biggest issue is water draining and going into the ground below.

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS:

Marlee Boxler: Excited to have this work complete there were tourism impacts felt in Corbett. The visitor center provided routing around the closure during the closure. Anticipate rolling into telling people that paid parking is starting at Vista House.

Arthur: This fix will last for a long time?

Jason: The true fix would be a viaduct, life expectancy with new fixes should get us into the next couple of decades. Mesh layers will help support the roadway and stabilize the ground.

Mike: The drainage system is new, correct?

Jason: Yes, some of this is new to hopefully help with water saturation. The old wall had one drain, but we added more to help move the water away from the roadway.

Jeanette: The earlier fix had metal drainage pipes that were too reflective, and I remember we had to go back and paint it almost camouflage to ensure that they wouldn't be seen.

Jason: All outfall pipes are brown in accordance with National Scenic Area requirements.

Updates

Friends of the Historic Highway

Jeanette Kloos: Terra asked the Friends group to fund the medallions for the Perham to Mitchell State Trail project, and we're happy to provide the funding for that. There is also funding for repaving parts of the State Trail, working with OPRD to understand the best segments to help pave.

The Rowena Fire forced the Gorge Ride cancellations, we do have it scheduled for June 20 of next year. Will need to work with State Parks and others to make sure all venues are available. Antique car tour went on as planned and had 7 cars. We hosted four work parties this year; painted guardrail, pulled weeds, etc. Perseid meteor shower where we gave away popcorn and received donations. Working on getting additional board members for Friends of Historic Columbia River Highway. We don't want to have issues with quorum.

ODOT Updates

Terra: Provided an overview of current and future projects for the Historic Highway and State Trail.

1. Travel Oregon grant to update the Historic Highway and State Trail maps. Working on the agreement with Clackamas County Tourism. Maps should be updated within a year or less.

AJ Zelada [in chat]: Maps: biggest need, especially month people w/ disabilities is the enumeration of Rest Rooms that are Accessible!

'Especially among'

2. Jordan Road Multi-Use path. Not directly related to the Historic Highway, but it is part of/adjacent to the 40-mile loop bike route. Currently with ODOT procurement, there will be shoulder closures and construction will likely start winter 2025 and will take about a year.
3. Larch Mountain Slide Repair – already received an update on this project. Emergency response funds.
4. Viaduct Repair - already received an update on this project. Funded through FLAP, and the ODOT Bridge program.
5. McCord Creek I-84 eastbound bridge replacement, under construction there will be a full Historic Highway State Trail closure in 2026 – shuttles providing connection 24/7. Spring 2025 – Fall 2026. Eastbound land closure in place now, up to December. Funded through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Bridge funds.
6. Eagle Creek Staircase Alternatives Analysis USFS received congressionally directed spending to do an alternatives analysis to replace the stairs with ADA-compliant segment. This project alternatives process should be going through mid-2026.
7. Cascade Locks TSP Update kickoff should be sometime this winter and it will be an 18-month process. Their last TSP update was in 2001, very excited to kick this off. No traffic impacts. Funded through the Transportation Growth Management (TGM) Program. Also looking to update the Historic Highway Programmatic Agreement with the City of Cascade Locks as part of this work.
8. Perham to Michell State Trail Construction we received an update on this project. Funded through FLAP and CDS funds.
9. Mitchell to I-84 State Trail Design and Construction we received an update on this project. Design funding through ODOT regional funds, construction funded through NSFLTP funds. Extended cross-over on I-84 to create the bike/ped tunnel.
10. City of Hood River Historic Columbia Highway Integrated Land Use Area and Transportation Plan refining Westcliff Drive design, adopting Cascade Ave design into TSP, and zoning code updates. Expected to kick off in mid-2026, currently RFP is out. There will be a lot of public engagement with landowners and residents of Hood River. Also looking to update the Historic Highway Programmatic Agreement with the City of Hood River as part of this work.
11. Rowena Fire Recovery recovering and repairing damage, removing hazard trees, and about \$600k-\$800k of guardrail repairs. (Dan Shanahan shared updates). The issue currently is that the fire is still under investigation, so currently can't put in for emergency funding until the investigation is closed. Because of the budget situation, we can't reimburse later. This section is currently closed to traffic. In the next few weeks, we will be able to start cutting down trees – prioritizing the I-84 segment, but if there are extra funds, we'll look at the Historic Highway. There are roughly 3,000 trees that need to come down. There are also some debris flow hazards that will be marked with signs. The sign will be coming into Rowena and around Toolie Lake. There are a lot of state agencies working on this right now.

Arthur: Does it take about 18 months for this fire investigation?

Dan Shanahan: Yes, first we need to get a decision. If there is a responsible party, then we will need to determine payment.

Kent Kalsch: Traveler Information Council (TIC) is responsible for existing visitor kiosk in the parking lot at Exit 31. Working with them to figure out what NSA requirements are for a replacement. New kiosk is going to be more in line with NSA standards. Submitted to Multnomah County for review and once approved, hope to replace existing kiosk by next summer. With these budget cuts, 8 employees are on the chopping block and I will be retiring at the end of October. Whole highway will suffer from maintenance.

Arthur: Thank you for all that you do, don't know how we will replace you!

Lynn Burditt [in chat]: Kent - this will be the changing of an era - your contributions have been phenomenal and you have made such a difference to communities, the resources, visitors, and all the partners you work with. May your next adventure be grand.

AJ Zelada [in chat]: Kent...Thanks so much for all your incredible smart. Work! Good luck whatever continent you land in !

Rian [in chat]: I don't know how we're going to do it either... Kent is one of kind.

OPRD Updates

Clay Courtright: OR State Parks is waiving their fee at most state parks, traditionally parks charged a fee at about 2 dozen. On October 1 there will be a fee at some previously-free parks including the following in the Gorge: Lewis & Clark, Starvation Creek, Vista House. OPRD chose the parks for fees depending on if there is a visitor center, plumbed bathrooms, other services, we can't afford them without charging a fee at some of these parks. State Parks would rather not reduce workforce and keep the parks clean.

AJ Zelada: People need accessible bathrooms, could this new parking charge be used to create more accessible restrooms? Can this fund help remediate this lack of accessible bathrooms?

Clay: OR State Parks is not general funded, the more direct answer to that is that OR State Parks is working to hit short-term, mid-term, and long-term ADA goals. We are working on that; there are buckets of money for ADA upgrades. We don't know where that money is going to be, it will take a while to figure out how many people pay the fee.

Arthur: Crooked River Bridge State Park got new bathrooms and they are all ADA accessible.

Clay: Some of the gorge parks are tricky because of the terrain. ODOT has been a great partner.

Marlee [in chat]: Clay, the OPRD website accessibility notes are very helpful. I especially like when they include the photos in addition to details! We've used that to educate our staff on what parks are accessible and in what ways, so appreciate the effort your team has made to put that info on your website.

Jake Anderson: Economic development officer for the City of The Dalles. The city is planning on taking First Street and Federal Street and converting them into plazas. The City is taking on a \$7 million dollar rebuild of 1st Street. Trying to bring people that use the waterfront trail all the way into downtown. The transportation building will be renovated into ADA restrooms. The Dalles would love a letter of support for an RTP grant by the end of the month.

Arthur: No problem in us supporting this?

Terra: Not at all but I may need some help with the letter of support as I will be out all next week.

Arthur: Any objections in principle to the committee providing a letter of support? None noted.

USFS Updates

Stephen Elgart: A couple of permanent and seasonal interns are wrapping up their seasons. Still mostly in a hiring freeze. A lot of projects are coming along; there are still pockets of money for projects. Dog Mountain parking lot redesign, Wyeth Bench area will be a parking lot for Cascade Locks trails, got an RTP grant for this site. Eagle Creek Trail registration hut has been somewhat decommissioned, the foundation is getting some slight repairs, then USFS will be rebuilding the top of the recreation hut, looking at new bike rack construction. End of season campground closures on October 1.

AJ Zelada [in chat]: Will report bike rack issue in Dec!

Casey Gatz: Yesterday the agency met on the Gorge sign replacement project throughout the Gorge. We're looking to implement some of these sign replacements throughout the next year. The Scenic Area signs will be replaced.

Marlee Boxler: Does this include the ODOT Highway 30 signs or just the USFS signs?

Terra: Just Gorge specific green wooden signs with the curved tops on concrete pillars

Kate Baumgartner: New promotions on ADA and how Accessible Oregon is coming from Travel Oregon. Theme for this call. Big thanks to Terra for bringing Corbett tourist concerns to Travel Oregon so they could quickly respond to those challenges.

Committee Round Table

Arthur: We will need to have, at a minimum, a vice chair. When should we do it?

Terra: If it pleases the committee, I will put it on the December agenda to do appointments of Chair and Vice Chair.

Terra: Judy Davis is no longer on the committee, and Mike Ballinger is the Wasco County replacement.

Arthur: We will talk about how to honor Judy Davis since she left.

Rian: Arthur, the Kent situation. Kent will be missed. The relationships, his dedication. Glad that Kent has the opportunity to take his retirement, but it will be a big hole to fill.

Tricia: Note to Terra as my role of County appointee, don't know how long my term lasts.

Terra: I need to look into that, more discussion to come. I did intend to make sure that the governor appointees expire every 4 years and county appointees will expire on the off years.

Stephen: Reminder that there are going to be renovations happening at Multnomah Falls over the next couple of years one of those renovations will be re-doing the bathrooms.

Arthur: Fingers crossed we will be able to visit our partners In Troutdale, hoping to have meeting in person. Closing the meeting: Oregon does a better job of maintaining roads and highways than anywhere else in the country. We are very lucky to have had the quality of service in the highway system. I hope that the State can figure out funding so that roads can continue in good repair.

Marlee [in chat]: depending on the date our new Sharon Nesbit Heritage Park (the Sandy River Park & Trail) may be completed! We could do a tour!

Meeting adjourned at 11:23am