A PROPOSAL REGARDING TRANSPORTATION WITHIN

THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE NATIONAL SCENIC AREA

Date January 12, 2016

Purpose: To take full advantage of the new federal transportation legislation that identifies transportation projects on the National Highway System in National Scenic Areas as being eligible for new discretionary federal transportation funding intended for significant freight and highway projects. To develop a clear process for local governmental bodies, business and industry, both states and interested parties within the NSA region to work together to identify a comprehensive set of transportation needs and priorities and then seek funding for those priorities through state and federal resources.

Background: The Gorge National Scenic Area was established by the federal government in 1986. The two purposes for this act are to enhance the natural resources and the economy of the region. The original intent of the legislation was that states, the federal government and local communities would work together to significantly carry out the two purposes of the NSA. The GORGE NSA is the largest of the 12 National Scenic Areas in the country and is home to over 70,000 people and attracts over 5 million visitors annually-with more anticipated each year. Additionally the Mexico to Canada Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) cuts through the Gorge at Cascade Locks, Oregon and Stevenson, Washington. In addition to the PCT, the State of Oregon has made an investment in a bicycle/pedestrian trail from Troutdale to Cascade Locks. Plans have been developed to extend this trail all the way to Rufus.

In recent years there has been a significant resurgence of collaboration and cooperation by various parties within the Gorge. Of particular attention recently has been the need to enhance the local economy, create new
jobs, new businesses and strengthen family and community. To buttress this new effort, we should remember the two states have entered into a two state compact that outlines the states ongoing commitment to the NSA and its people.

Due to significantly increased tourism and related traffic, new business and industry location and expansion, weather impacts, train movement within the NSA, safety and the movement of goods, communities within the NSA are attempting to deal with a number of major issues related to transportation. Parking, safe transport via rail, adequate roads, new bridges, bridge rehabilitation, emergency services, fishing habitat access, and other factors have historically only been dealt with piece meal. There is a need for a comprehensive approach to all transportation issues within the NSA region. The new federal legislation, linked with the Gorge Commission, now provides the perfect opportunity to identify transportation needs within the NSA region and to propose comprehensive long term solutions to those transportation needs in the region. Locally, businesses, governments and citizens are now working closely together through OneGorge to realize the full impact and potential of the NSA. Further, the State of Washington, through the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), is also currently conducting a major review of transportation issues associated with Highway 14. The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) in partnership with the Port of Portland is also studying freight traffic issues along I-84 from Portland to Morrow County.

Through the concerted advocacy efforts of the newly formed OneGorge, the federal legislation dealing with transportation was modified to incorporate a specific reference to project eligibility in National Scenic Areas. The new bill also includes language permitting states to save time and costs by bundling multiple bridge projects as one project. OneGorge has over 100 participant’s including local governments, local business and industry and focuses its advocacy efforts to creating jobs and enhancing the regional economy.

Within the NSA, cities, counties, Ports and others already have prepared lists of priorities. The local needs, transportation issues and project
suggestions are already used in both states to factor into state wide funding programs. The proposal contained herein merely suggests that all these existing plans and needs plus new needs and priorities be pulled together into one NSA regional effort.

GOAL: Through strategic use of the National Scenic Area Act and the two state Gorge Commission, bring all parties together over a six month period of time to develop an agreed upon set of transportation priorities within the NSA and consistent with the two state compact and the NSA priorities (natural resources and the economy).

WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED? The Gorge Commission, the 5 ports, regional offices of WSDOT and ODOT, cities, counties, local businesses, educational institutions, environmental groups, FOG, PCTA, emergency service providers, MCEDD, Forest Service and others with an interest.

THE STRATEGY: Following is the suggested strategy to be implemented to achieve the Goal- a comprehensive list of transportation needs and priorities within the NSA.

1. To get the Gorge Commission to agree to be the facilitator and coordinator for this effort. (January 2016)
2. For regional entities, businesses and others to agree to assist in the effort and to create a project steering committee to assist and work with the Gorge Commission in achieving the goal. (February 2016)
   a. Provide staff and other resources.
   b. Assist in the cost of this effort according to ability.
3. Convene a meeting of all parties to share existing plans and priorities. (March 2016)
   a. City needs and priorities
   b. County needs and priorities
   c. WSDOT and ODOT needs and priorities
   d. Ports, business and others
4. Following identification of existing needs and priorities, the Steering Committee, working with the Gorge Commission, creates a Gorge wide set of needs and priorities.

5. Circulate the draft set of Gorge wide needs and priorities as created by the Steering Committee for review and comment. (March-April)

6. At the end of the review period, the Gorge Commission and its Steering Committee meet and create a final long range set of needs and priorities for filing with both states and the federal government. (April)

7. The Steering Committee, working with and through OneGorge and the Gorge Commission, establishes an advocacy plan tied to grant and funding requests to both states and the federal government. (June)

8. All parties to this effort consistently lobby, advocate and work to get priority projects funded and built. (July on)

The Request: That the Gorge Commission adopt this suggestion.

Thank You.