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To: Columbia River Gorge Commissioners
From: Krystyna U. Wolniakowski
Cc: Staff
Date: July 6, 2016
RE: ACTION ITEM: Columbia River Gorge Commission “Transportation Vision”

At several past Commission meetings, staff presented updates to the Commission regarding the process by which the Commission could endorse regional “Gorge-wide” important transportation initiatives/projects that meet the criteria (or “lens”) adopted by the Commission at the May 10, 2016 meeting to assure that they are consistent with our Management Plan for the National Scenic Area. The Commission’s endorsement would demonstrate our commitment to working with our partners to encourage regionally coordinated efforts that benefit the National Scenic Area, and assist our transportation partners when they submit proposals for specific projects and seek funding from regional, state and/or federal funding sources.

Staff met in late June with representatives from the Regional Transportation Council, MCEDD, the Ports of Cascade Locks and Hood River, and Summit Strategies (a consulting firm assisting with transportation projects) to discuss how best to move forward to prepare the material needed for the Commission to discuss, and then decide on, regional transportation priorities in the NSA. Partners recommended that the Commission should first develop our own “vision statement” based on our criteria that could serve as the guideposts for projects or initiatives that will be generated by transportation partners working in the NSA. Below is our first draft of our vision statement that we believe is consistent with the spirit and intent of the NSA Act and our Management Plan addressing transportation.

Staff recommends that the Commission adopt the vision and goals, and give the Executive Director authority to endorse or reject a project that is submitted for Commission endorsement based on staff’s evaluation that the proposed project meets the vision and “lens” criteria. In addition, a full review of the proposed project may need to be completed anyway to show consistency with the Management Plan. If approved, staff could produce a letter of endorsement as needed.

If there are concerns about a proposed project submitted for endorsement, staff could bring it forward for full Commission review and discussion, with an opportunity for public comment.

Gorge Transportation Vision

The Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (NSA) is an area of unparalleled scenic qualities and diverse landscapes. The region is served by an integrated transportation system serving both residents and visitors. This transportation system must provide multimodal opportunities, access, and safety, while protecting and enhancing the natural, scenic, cultural and recreational resources, as well as protecting and supporting the NSA economy.

Gorge Transportation Goals

The Columbia River Gorge Commission supports a strategic and comprehensive approach to transportation planning in the Gorge. To that end, the Commission continues to convene transportation authorities and stakeholders to develop long-range planning, infrastructure projects, and transportation management programs.

The Columbia River Gorge Commission supports a long-range, comprehensive approach to ensure transportation projects sustain the character and continue to protect the resources of the National Scenic Area for future generations. Our general strategic priorities are to ensure safety, adequate capacity, and connectivity along principal regional travel corridors, such as major highways, bridges, and the Historic Columbia River Highway.

Recognizing the need for coordinated, Gorge-wide, bi-state transportation projects, Gorge Commission staff worked with several local representatives to develop a list of criteria that can be used to evaluate proposed transportation solutions within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (NSA) that would be consistent with the management plan.

When considering specific projects or efforts among transportation partners, the Columbia River Gorge Commission staff will consider the degree to which a project will meet one or more of the following criteria and be supported and identified as a priority in local, state and/or federal plans before endorsing the project:

- Enhance access to sites within the NSA.
- Enhance safety and provide a positive experience for NSA visitors and residents.
- Protect and enhance the scenic, natural, cultural and recreation resources in the NSA.
- Support and enhance the economic vitality of the NSA.
- Is at a scale that has a significant positive impact on NSA transportation or resources
- Has tribal support and positive impact within the NSA.
- Promote alternative modes of transportation including energy-efficient vehicles, transit, and pedestrian and bicycle access.