

October 12, 2020

The Honorable Elaine Chao  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE  
Washington, D.C. 20590

*Re: Nationally Significant Federal Lands and Tribal Project Program*

Dear Secretary Chao,

The undersigned participants of the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance are writing to share our support of Oregon Department of Transportation's application seeking Nationally Significant Federal and Tribal Lands Program funding to complete the remaining segments of the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail. This project will enhance our region's transportation network by providing a safe route for cyclists and walkers between Viento State Park and the City of Hood River. Even more, it will complete a 30-year effort to restore and reconnect this historically and recreationally significant 73-mile Historic Highway.

Members of the Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance are committed to developing the region as a world-class sustainable tourism economy. The Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail is one of our most beloved and valuable assets, helping people of all modalities access federal lands in our nation's only bi-state National Scenic Area. The highway plays a vital role in our region's tourism economy.

In 2019, visitors to the Mt. Hood-Columbia River Gorge region contributed \$447 million in direct spending to the local economy, supporting more than 5,000 jobs, according to the latest study commissioned by Travel Oregon. Cyclists alone generated over \$21 million in visitor spending within the communities located in the Columbia River Gorge. With the construction of this final segment of the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail, the benefits to our region's rural communities will grow exponentially. The continuous 73-mile fully restored Historic Highway will bring more people into our local restaurants, hotels, stores, galleries, museums and more.

In anticipation of the completion of the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail, regional partners have been working together on many projects that will improve quality of life for residents as well as enhance the visitor experience. This includes enhancements to our public transit system, development of a multi-state hiking trail, investments in public bathrooms, water-filling stations and picnic areas (known as "bike hubs"), and communication strategies to encourage people to visit communities that are off the beaten path (ReadySetGorge.com).

Thank you for considering ODOT's funding request. We enthusiastically support this project and hope you will consider funding ODOT's proposal in full.

SIGNATURES