

Introduction



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The Historic Columbia River Highway (HCRH) was a marvel of engineering and road construction when it was dedicated in 1916, and it is still one of the great scenic highways in the country. While many miles of the original highway are intact and are used and enjoyed by thousands of visitors to the Columbia River Gorge today, other portions of the highway were abandoned or, eliminated by the construction of the Bonneville Dam in 1936, the water-grade route in the 1950s and the construction of what is now Interstate 84 (I-84) in the 1960s and 1970s.

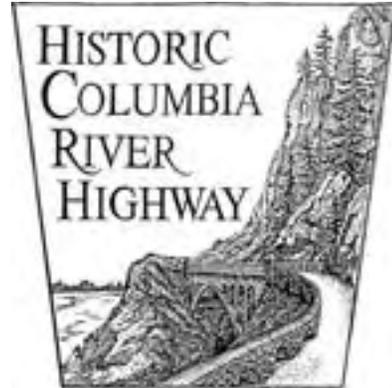
*The people of Oregon country
have built this great highway
for agricultural and commercial
pursuits, as well as for the enjoyment
of the beautiful and grand in nature.*

Samuel C. Lancaster,
The Columbia: America's Great Highway

This Master Plan for the HCRH will provide direction for the ongoing rehabilitation of the highway and the construction of connection trails along the linking abandoned sections of the historic highway into a continuous travel route. Central to this document are the “vision” statements for the highway’s three sections.

HCRH Significance

The Historic Columbia River Highway was the first major paved road in the Pacific Northwest. It was an engineering masterpiece, incorporating high engineering



*Figure 1—Historic Columbia River
Highway Keystone Sign*

standards for its era, coupled with a respect for the Columbia River Gorge’s magnificent landscape.¹ The HCRH was designed and constructed as the first scenic highway in the United States.² The highway was also identified as a historical resource in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area Act. The Oregon Legislature created an Advisory Committee for the Highway to make recommendations to the State regarding appropriate activities within the Historic District.³ Portions of the highway have been designated as an Oregon Scenic Byway and as an All-American Road. The HCRH State Trail, which links remnants of the original roadway, is also a National Recreational Trail and has been designated Oregon’s Millennium Legacy Trail.

¹ For additional information, see Appendix 1 for excerpts of “Columbia River Highway Historic District—Nomination of the Old Columbia River Highway in the Columbia Gorge to the National Register of Historic Places.”

² See Appendix 2 for excerpts of the “Columbia River Highway National Historic Landmark Nomination.”

³ See Appendix 3 for a copy of the legislation.

Vision for HCRH

The vision for the Historic Columbia River Highway is to see the scenic highway reborn, with significant additional progress toward completion of projects to create “a continuous visitor attraction providing economic development to the communities,” as outlined in the 1987 legislative policy. Mitchell Point will once again be the site of a tunnel, providing a hiking and biking connection between Hood River and points west. Viewpoints, such as Ruthton Point, will again be readily accessible. This National Historic Landmark District will be in excellent condition and will be internationally recognized as a World Heritage site. It will continue to be an All-American Road and a destination unto itself. Restoration and management of the historic, designed landscapes will continue on this - the King of Roads.

Sandy River to Warrendale (Section 1 - 38.5 miles), is open to motor vehicle use. The vision for this section is to preserve the HCRH as a two-lane, slow-speed rural road that maintains much of its original character. A motorist or bicyclist slowly traversing this section of the HCRH should be able to imagine that the year is 1924, while enjoying the rural scenery.

Warrendale to Mosier (Section 2 – 37 miles) extends from the end of the drivable section at Warrendale to the beginning of the drivable section of the HCRH at Mosier. Section 2 suffered severe losses during the period between 1933 and the 1970s. This was the period when the Bonneville Dam was constructed, a water-level highway route was developed and, finally, the water-level route was improved to Interstate highway standards. Of the approximately 37 mile length of the HCRH in this section, only about 10 miles remain open to motor vehicles. Within

this section there exist a number of short, isolated segments of the historic road. The vision for this section is to preserve and enhance the drivable segments and to develop a continuous bicycle and pedestrian connection (HCRH State Trail) between Warrendale and Mosier.

Mosier to The Dalles (Section 3) is open to motor vehicle use for fifteen miles from Mosier to Chenoweth Creek. With minor exceptions, the HCRH remains in its original location, has not been extensively modified and functions as a rural collector road. The vision for this section is similar to Section 1, which is to preserve the HCRH as a two-lane, slow-speed rural road that maintains much of its original character. A motorist or bicyclist slowly traversing this section of the HCRH should be able to imagine that the year is 1924, while enjoying the rural scenery.

Purpose of Master Plan Update

This **revised** HCRH *Master Plan* will update the 1996 *Master Plan*, including all the policy recommendations that have been made by the Historic Columbia River Highway Advisory Committee. This **revised** document will gather together all agreements, design decisions and background information about the HCRH, including a description of activities that have occurred over the last decade. The Executive Summary will serve as a prospectus to leverage funding to accomplish items outlined in the Implementation Strategy.

Summary of Major Recommendations

- 1) Restore the Historic Columbia River Highway (following the US Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties) to its 1920s appear-

ance, using the 1924 Mile Post Log and historic photos for guidance. Repair and maintain all contributing historic structures (bridges, rock walls, gutters, curbs, buildings, etc.).

2) Reconnect the extant segments of the Historic Columbia River Highway to form a continuous visitor attraction, connecting the communities of the Columbia River Gorge.

3) Maintain existing pavement, but do not widen, except in the Urban Areas under provisions included in Programmatic Agreements. Future paving will maintain the exposure of curb and drop to gutter as designed and constructed in the HCRH Gutter Restoration project (2006).

4) Provide visitor information through interpretive signs, brochures, web site and personal contact.

5) Where guardrail protection is needed use two-rail, wooden guardrail, painted white. On sections open to motor vehicle traffic, use steel-backed wooden guardrail. On State Trail sections, use historically accurate guard fence.

6) Install triangular, concrete mile posts, as indicated in the 1924 log.

7) Where the local street name is other than “Historic Columbia River Highway”, add the Historic Columbia River Highway cap above the street name sign.

8) Seek expansion of the All- American Road designation to include all sections of the Highway in Hood River County, for a continuous route.

9) Continue collaboration and partnerships with cities, counties, agencies, non-profits and the general public to achieve

restoration, reconnection and maintenance of the highway, including implementation of the Programmatic Agreements.

10) Provide and enhance visitor facilities at parks and trailheads along the HCRH.

Priority Recommendations and Cost Estimates

Priority projects include:

1. Continue restoration of historic features (\$6 million);
2. Complete the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail projects, which will link drivable portions of the HCRH. In priority order, the State Trail projects include:
 - Warrendale to Moffett Creek - \$9.0 million
 - Viento - \$1.4 million
 - Mitchell Point to Hood River - \$6.1 million
 - Mitchell Point - \$6.2 million
 - Viento to Mitchell Point - \$7.4 million
 - Wyeth to Starvation Creek - \$16.6 million;
3. Restore the railing on the Chenoweth Creek Bridge (\$500,000); and
4. Repair the sliding pavement just east of the junction with the Larch Mountain Road.

Additional projects are listed under the section entitled: Plans for Funding Future Projects on the HCRH.

Implementation Strategy

- Seek Congressional earmarks.
- Seek private funding from foundations.
- Continue to apply for funding from Transportation sources (Transportation Enhancement, Forest Highway, Forest Highway Enhancement, and National Scenic Byway).
- Seek National Trail funds.
- Seek Historic Preservation funds.
- Seek Economic Development and Tourism funding.
- Seek dedicated funding for maintenance of HCRH (both highway and trail).
- Implement a specific strategy to celebrate the 100th year anniversary of HCRH which occurs in 2016.

A. Continuous Visitor Attraction—Develop a continuous Visitor Attraction from the Sandy River to Chenoweth Creek

B. World Heritage Site—Develop, submit and attempt to obtain designation as a World Heritage Site, strengthening the international significance of the highway.

C. Restore and Repair Historic Elements—Implement the Western Federal Lands Highway Division, Federal Highway Administration’s Project Identification Report for approximately \$6 million of restoration and preservation work for curb, gutters, culverts, parapet walls, guardrail, walls and bridges. Submit an application for Forest Highway funding with the next “call for projects.”

D. Maintenance and Operation—Restore \$300,000/biennium of special maintenance funds for highway historic features and structures maintenance

and repairs (masonry repairs, painting guardrail, signing replacement, etc.). Seek dedicated funding for HCRH State Trail maintenance and operations.

E. Marketing Plan—Coordinate and support efforts of the Gorge Visitors Association and Oregon Tourism Commission in marketing the Historic Columbia River Highway as a destination site. Seek funding for marketing activities. When needed, update and reprint HCRH Brochure and Columbia River Gorge Bike Map and maintain the HCRH website and Byways Online web page.

F. Community Collaboration—The Historic Columbia River Highway was designed to not only connect the ‘beauty spots’ of the Columbia River Gorge but is an integral part of the connection to the character of local communities that are joined by the historic highway. The historic highway offers the communities an opportunity to include the unique design integrity of the historic highway in an expression of their community character.

The implementation of the HCRH master plan will include local community collaboration, partnerships, and stakeholder interest in the historic highway and recognize the dynamics of community growth, economic development, and community planning for a livable future while embracing the historical integrity of the HCRH.

G. Visual Quality—Maintain and enhance the outstanding vistas and natural wonders associated with America’s first scenic highway. The visual landscape will be managed to provide vegetation management to reveal the vistas and natural wonders.



Figure 2—HCRH Vision Poster (see inside for enlarged version)