



# Oregon Travel Information Council

Presentation to 2017

Oregon Senate Business & Transportation Committee

March 6, 2017

## The Legislature's decision to entrust key rest areas to TIC:

Following a study of Oregon Rest Areas, the Legislature, in 2009 began the process of transferring rest areas from the Department of Transportation (ODOT) to the Travel Information Council (TIC) along with directed funding from the highway fund. Since then the Legislature has made additional transfers of rest areas from ODOT to the TIC.

## What we do and how:

### Our charge –

The Travel Information Council is a semi-independent state agency responsible for the management, maintenance, improvement and development of the rest areas entrusted to us by the Legislature.

### Our funding stream –

The dedicated funds we receive each year from the highway fund reflect the Legislature's desire for robust services and support for TIC's managed rest areas.

### Our history –

In 2006, Governor Kulongoski formed the Transportation and Tourism Task Force. Among the task force's recommendations, rest areas were identified as key components of the state transportation system:

- **The 2008 report began with:** "Oregon's network of rest areas, upon which travelers rely heavily and take for granted, is not that old. However, like the highway system itself, any public infrastructure with 30+ years of use is going to need upgrades to retain functionality. Investment in rest areas hasn't kept pace and use has continued to climb."
- **The Taskforce stated:** "Going further, the values and goals embraced by the Oregon Transportation Plan emphasize safety, efficiency, customer service, accountability, livability and economic prosperity. It is apparent by our study that rest areas are not adequately reflecting those values."

- **The report continued:** “People worry about entering rest areas after dusk; long haul truck operators cannot find parking at night and are thus forced to continue driving; crime is not as rare as it should be, because rest areas in Oregon are unattended.”
- **The report concluded** that rest areas in general required investment and uniform management. As part of implementing that recommendation, the Travel Information Council (TIC) agreed to take on active management of rest areas as requested by the Legislature.

**The 2009 Legislature passed HB 2001, the Jobs and Transportation Act (JTA).** Effective January 1, 2010, TIC would be required to maintain and operate seven ODOT rest areas, and agreed to take on two other connected rest areas. Additional rest areas were added in 2012 SB 1591.

### **The Role of TIC-Managed Rest Areas:**

- Highway and driver safety
  - Safe, convenient, comfortable and free stop for:
    - Restroom facilities
    - Travel relief and relaxation
    - Pet exercising
    - Cell-phone/internet use
    - Way-finding (maps, directions, a place to stop and plan)
  - Truck and auto parking (up to 12 hours)
  - Venue for Free Coffee Program
  - Support for travelers in need
- Kiosks and information about Oregon and local attractions/services
  - Showcase Oregon history and heritage
  - Guide travelers to attractions and services in Oregon communities, supporting local economic development and tourism

### **Working Model Today:**

- OTE staff presence eight hours a day, seven days a week
  - Ensure rest areas are clean, attractive, well-lit and well-serviced
  - Rapid repair of vandalism damage and maintenance issues
  - Respectful interaction with rest area visitors, facilitating compliance with rest area rules for the safety of all
  - Knowledgeable interface with OSP and local law enforcement
  - Availability in “on call” situations (standard is one-hour response time)
  - Responsive to traveler inquiries and need for assistance
- Additional services (janitorial and landscape) hired from local communities, and determined to be most cost-effective delivery

- OTE’s work supports ODOT’s Sustainability Program, conserving resources including power, water, sewer, chemicals, and disposable supplies. Waterless urinals mitigate impact of water use and disposal.

This model is more expensive to be sure, but was specifically designed to ensure that the rest areas managed by TIC were safe, clean, in good repair and welcoming. The Legislature directed highway funds to be committed to this effort to address the improved approach they wanted to see in the rest areas along the I-5 and I-84 corridors.

**Key Partners –**

TIC is fortunate to have solid working relationships with our state government partners, without whom we couldn’t do our job properly. These include:

- **ODOT** – Owners of the rest areas and responsible for overseeing the requirements for proper use of highway funds within the right of way of the highway system
- **Travel Oregon and Destination Marketing Organizations** – Part of TIC’s charge is to ensure that rest areas promote tourism in neighboring communities. Travel Oregon is the tourism agency that brings people to Oregon and shares opportunities for visitors to experience. TIC provides infrastructure for tourism-related content delivery not only in rest areas, but also with its information kiosks and highway logo signs.
- **Oregon State Police** – One of the challenges facing rest areas is the level of illegal activity in these public spaces. As a central part of our charge, OSP has been an invaluable partner in our success in greatly reducing criminal activity in the rest areas entrusted to the TIC.

**Day-to-day challenges:**

By design, the TIC is able to focus on its rest areas at a level that our partners cannot. We are able to evaluate and prioritize plans to improve both individual locations and the system as a whole. We work to address aging infrastructure, deferred maintenance and facility upgrades, and constantly look for ways to improve travelers’ experiences. For example, at Government Camp, we painted, re-roofed, installed heating, and upgraded our parking lot. Working with our partners in Clackamas County, the more than 500,000 travelers who visit the rest area each year can now access a digital visitor information kiosk 24-hours a day, directing them to local resources and tourism opportunities in the area.

However, when you have overall operations serving more than 18 million travelers a year, it means you also get sometimes unpleasant challenges:

- Vandalism & graffiti
- Drugs & paraphernalia
- Break-ins and theft
- Weapons
- Clogged sewer systems

Toll-free numbers are posted at each rest area and calls are answered 24-hours a day, forwarding calls to staff for after-hours emergency response.

And this winter, we've had a LOT of weather...

**Unanticipated challenges:**

The funding provided to the TIC was based upon a robust model of public service, but the original design failed to account for some key elements:

- **Deferred Maintenance:** The age of the rest areas are such that many of the systems they rely upon: water, sewer, electricity, etc. are aging and in need of upgrade or replacement. These systems are usually served by area water and sewer districts, who expect us to maintain our portion of the system.
- **Large Scale Maintenance:** Rest areas provide critical parking for cars and trucks that must be maintained. Paving constitutes a significant investment and must be done on a regular basis to prevent deterioration of the substructure that, if impacted, constitutes a significantly larger investment to maintain.
- **ADA Upgrades:** Recent court action regarding the Americans with Disability Act has required improvements be made to the transportation system statewide to comply with ADA requirements. As part of the transportation infrastructure, the rest areas managed by the TIC are included in the required upgrades. We do not yet know the full extent of the compliance requirements, but early indications are that they are numerous and substantive; funds to address the mandates will be required for compliance.
- **Facility Expansion to meet Capacity Demands:** Traveler counts continue to grow, taxing the capacity of several locations. The prime example is the Oak Grove Rest Area on I-5, north of Eugene, which experiences traveler demand that seriously exceeds the rest area's current capacity. More than 1.2 million people visit this rest area each year, and the numbers continue to grow.

**How we've managed so far:**

To address the maintenance issues found after taking over responsibility for the rest areas under our management, TIC revised its original model. We restructured operations to carve out and set aside funds to meet needs for deferred maintenance of aging infrastructure and to create a limited reserve for emergency repairs. Following are some of the larger expenditures to date:

**French Prairie**

- Resurfaced Northbound Truck Parking (2012)..... \$180,000
- Reopened rear parking lot rest rooms (2013) ..... \$15,000
- Rebuilt Irrigation system (2013)..... \$12,500

▪ Resealed all (total of 6) Parking Lots (2014).....	\$100,000
▪ Replaced Roofs on redwood water tanks (2014).....	\$8,500
▪ Upgraded outdoor lighting to LED (2016) .....	\$45,056
<b>Santiam River</b>	
▪ Overhauled & upgraded sewer pump and filtration system (2011).....	\$17,500
▪ Completed riparian clearing along Santiam River SB (2012).....	\$7,500
▪ Ground & Repaired Parking Lots .....	\$10,780
▪ Installed Heaters in Auxiliary Restrooms .....	\$5,850
▪ Upgraded outdoor lighting to LED (2016) .....	\$51,052
<b>Oak Grove</b>	
▪ Restroom remodel/ADA upgrades (2014).....	\$7,500
▪ Rebuilt building drainage system (2014).....	\$3,510
▪ Rebuilt wastewater filtration system (2015).....	\$146,800
<b>Cabin Creek</b>	
▪ Rebuilt surface water runoff and control system (2016) .....	\$2,500
<b>Manzanita</b>	
▪ Constructed new sidewalk with handrails south bound rest area (2011).....	\$8,500
▪ Upgraded and rebuilt irrigation system (2012).....	\$7,500
▪ Sealed & re-striped parking lots (2014).....	\$29,303
▪ Repaired Sewer Holding Tank (2016).....	\$17,533
<b>Sunset</b>	
▪ Rehabilitated main restroom building (2014) .....	\$7,500
▪ Replaced sewer lift pumps (2014) .....	\$10,000
▪ Rebuilt Irrigation System (2015) .....	\$5,500
<b>Boardman</b>	
▪ Overhauled irrigation system (2012) .....	\$10,000
<b>Stanfield</b>	
▪ Upgraded to LED Lighting (2016) .....	\$13,000
<b>Deadman Pass</b>	
▪ Re-opened Well (in process).....	\$25,000
<b>Baker Valley</b>	
▪ Upgraded Well Control System (2016) .....	\$7,590
<b>Weatherby</b>	
▪ Repaired Parking Lots (2014).....	\$7,911

**Ontario**

- Drilled new irrigation well (2013) .....\$8,500
- Re-roofed Welcome Center & Oregon Trail Kiosk (2014) .....\$14,000
- Seal coated Parking Lots (2014) .....\$18,000

**Total Projects Completed**.....**\$884,910**

**Identified projects for which funds have been reserved:**

- Oak Grove Southbound raze and rebuild to increase capacity .....\$600,000
- Paving at Boardman, Santiam and other rest areas .....\$600,000
- ADA upgrades systemwide.....\$350,000
- Sewer upgrades .....\$50,000

**Total**.....**\$1,600,000**

**Long-term solutions needed:**

As outlined above, TIC has been able to conserve operating funds for larger projects, but rising costs make building such reserves impossible in the future. In the long term, we will need the help of the Legislature to identify solutions to the following problems, all of which relate to funding:

- 1) **Stabilization of Funding:** TIC seeks inclusion in a Transportation Package that will stabilize funding of rest areas at a sufficient and sustainable level without drawing dollars from ODOT priorities.
- 2) **Inflation:** Both operations and general maintenance work – which is highly labor intensive – becomes more expensive each year with the same pressures faced by all other agencies with rising personnel costs. Utilities (water, sewer, electrical), rest area supplies, and equipment costs will continue to increase despite ongoing careful cost-control measures.
- 3) **Capital Maintenance and Construction Funds:** There is about \$12 million in today’s dollars of deferred and necessary maintenance to address larger issues including paving, critical systems renovation and replacement, building upgrades, capacity expansion, and ADA compliance.

**The model is working:**

Oregon’s TIC-managed rest areas are significantly safer, cleaner and more welcoming to Oregonians and those traveling throughout the state because of our staffing model. Each location has “boots on the ground” eight hours a day, 365 days a year to ensure that our rest areas are clean, safe and inviting. We assist travelers with everything from lost keys wallets and cell phones, to putting out vehicle fires. We work closely with Oregon State Police to report criminal activity, request safety checks and assist travelers in distress. Our local staff serve as ambassadors to the areas around the rest area, able to provide directions and make travelers feel welcomed.

***Recent comments received in online reviews and in comment cards:***

- Whew, what a welcomed oasis. Plenty of areas to walk about stretching both your own and pets' legs. A designated pet potty area. Lots of picnic tables and shade to stay a spell if desired. But what we favor in rest stops is a guaranteed bathroom without obligation to make a purchase; easy off and back onto the highway taking much less time than trying to find somewhere in a city stop.
- I had avoided this rest stop for years because it was always dirty - How pleasurable over this past year to find it clean, no trash around and no un-emptied trash cans overflowing!
- Got slowed in Southern Oregon snow. Had to sleep! Thanks! Coffee is really appreciated! Staff was great and helpful. He pointed me at the travel guide. Now I want to come back to OR to visit Mt. Hood.
- I sure am glad you found a way to keep this facility open and even improve it. It is good use of our tax dollars. People were real nice! This place gets a lot of use! Thanks.
- This was the cleanest rest stop I have ever visited. They served free coffee and the hosts were awesome.
- This place rocks is the best rest area I stop by even if I don't have to. I usually drive 4 times a week.
- It's so nice to be able to say "Oh this one looks real nice, let's stop here!"
- Thank you OTE for keeping this rest stop so nice. I wanted you to know how much you are appreciated!
- Thanks for the clean and safe facility. Exemplary.
- Great rest area with a variety of restrooms for men and women. Wide open spaces with picnic benches and pet areas. Very clean and beautiful. This is the top rest area I've seen from Oregon.
- This rest area is approx. 13 miles north of Eugene, OR, but I would much rather stop here than in the city. It's exactly what someone traveling needs! Easy off and back on the highway access, room to stretch your legs, restrooms, picnic area, water, etc.

**Our Commitment:**

We believe in what we do. The Legislature entrusted us with this responsibility and we take it seriously because we know that Oregonians and visitors to Oregon rely upon us to take care of them when they need to stop and rest while traveling our state. Our staff takes great pride in providing the best-possible service to the travelers who come to our rest areas.

We have and will continue to maximize the use of the dollars we have been provided with. We know that the fiscal demands on the Legislature are significant and that rest areas are but one segment of many transportation-related needs.

In summary, what we do isn't glamorous. We operate rest areas, providing clean, safe and inviting locations that are open and free to use 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And they are used... by about 18 million people last year. Our model costs about 30 cents per visitor using the restrooms – and that

doesn't count all those who use the rest area only to stretch their legs, exercise a pet, get a cup of free coffee or use the Oregon Commission for the Blind's vending machines.

Rest Areas are an Oregon asset that deserves to be maintained... and improved. The Travel Information Council looks forward to securing sufficient and stable funding to continue operating rest areas to standards that make Oregon proud to welcome those who are traveling our highways.

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