



The Willamette Falls Locks Working Group

Clackamas County

Metro Regional Government

City of Milwaukie

City of Oregon City

City of West Linn

City of Wilsonville

Portland General Electric

Wilsonville Concrete Products

National Trust for Historic Preservation

One Willamette River Coalition

Good Afternoon Chair Beyer and Members of the Committee,

For the record, I am Governor Barbara Roberts and I was the Convenor of the Task Force established by this body in the 2015 Legislative session. You charged that Task Force to develop findings and recommendations for the repair and reopening of the Willamette Falls Locks and we have done that, which is why I am speaking with you today. I would like to thank the legislators that participated, Senators Devlin and Olsen and Representatives Parrish and Barton from this body as well as representatives from Transportation, Parks, Travel Oregon and the Marine Board for their contributions and insights. Along with representatives from local government, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, the US Army Corps of Engineers and members of the community, we developed the recommendation we are submitting to the 2017 Legislature for consideration in the form of SB 256. Several of you are sponsors of the bill and we appreciate your support.

The principle conclusion of the Task Force embodied in SB 256 is to establish a State Commission with the clear charge to determine the future for the Locks, with the likely result being a transfer from the US Army Corps of Engineers to a new entity, such as the state or a local government, a special district, or a consortium. I would like to elaborate on the need and importance of following through on this recommendation.

The Corps of Engineers has initiated a formal “Disposition Study” wherein they will carry out their due diligence to inform their decision on the future of the Locks. There needs to be an entity to be the non-federal sponsor with the clear line of authority and communication to interface with the Corps. The Task Force concluded this responsibility doesn’t fit squarely within the responsibility of any single existing state or local organization and therefore recommended that a new Commission be formed to represent the interests of local and regional governments, the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, businesses and the State. At the State level, it is envisioned that two state agencies would represent the aspects of the Locks that Oregonian's care about. Oregonians care about our cultural heritage and history, so State Parks has an interest in preserving the Locks for our citizens and also for the economic potential from cultural tourism. Business Oregon has an interest in the Locks for tourism, as well as movement of commerce on the Willamette and future economic potential from the possibility of inland ports. ODOT has an interest in the marine transportation of goods and also the potential of using the river as a transportation route in the event of a catastrophic event. The Marine Board has an interest for boating and recreational watercraft. As Governor, I led these agencies and understand how difficult it can be to bring different departments and agencies together, but how important it is for our State that we facilitate this collaboration for projects that have significance and that cross departmental lines.

The window of opportunity is here and now! The Locks have deteriorated since they were closed in 2011. The Corps of Engineers is bound by federal laws to invest in marine navigation facilities that produce economic benefit of national significance. With the shrinkage of the timber industry, there is no longer movement of huge tonnage of logs downriver through the Locks. As a result, it is the intent of the Corps to dispose of the facility, either to another federal, state or local entity or through dismantling it or disposal on the open market as surplus property. We have worked closely with the Corps District and headquarters leadership to work together toward an acceptable conclusion.

It is vital for our region that we carry out our own due diligence to inform **our** decision on the future of the Locks and participate fully in the Corps' efforts. We need to understand the engineering issues, the costs, the environmental consequences, the status of the title to the property and options for determining a transferee and funding source to repair and operate the facility. It is not sufficient to simply wait and have the Corps hand us their conclusion.

We have supportive federal legislation in place thanks to the hard work of the Oregon Congressional delegation. In the waning hours of the 114th Congress, the "Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation Act" (or the WIN Act) was signed into law by the outgoing President Barack Obama. Within that legislation is Section 1165 directing the Corps of Engineers in the case of disposition studies to "consider the extent to which the property concerned has economic, cultural, historic, or recreational significance or impacts at the national, State, or local level." The key question for the disposition study is the level of funding the Corps will contribute towards repair of a facility they want to transfer to another party. This language directs them to use a new standard. A State Commission should be in place so that our local and state interests are united and also have the opportunity to influence this new standard.

The Locks are a 143 year-old national treasure. It has value for its place in history and its cultural significance. The Locks also present an opportunity for economic development in the region, especially when you consider the combination of the Locks and the Legacy project across the river at the former Blue Heron site. With the repair and reopening of the Locks, the Willamette River will once again be navigable above the Falls. We are the stewards of this treasure and together, with a Willamette Falls Locks Commission and the passage of the bill, we can move forward.

Thank you for your "Do Pass" recommendation from this committee on SB 256.