



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

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RE: Testimony on HB 3281-1

Chair Witt, Vice Chair Breese-Iverson and Members of the Committee,

The Oregon Coast Trail (OCT) is a 362-mile trail that stretches along the entire coastline. A little less than half of the trail is across the sand on the ocean shore. The remainder of the trail winds through forests, along scenic headlands, through seven counties, twenty-eight coastal communities, and many state parks.

Some portions of the trail require hikers to walk along the shoulder of Hwy 101 or along busy city streets without sidewalks. While some maps depict a complete route and the OCT was declared “hikable” in 1988, to make connections between accessible beaches and developed trails, portions of the OCT follow the shoulder of Highway 101, local roads, or require a ferry scheduled in advance to complete the section. Some of these portions are unsafe and many hikers opt for a car, shuttle, or public transportation to make connections; other hikers skip these sections entirely.

In 2017, HB 3149 passed requiring OPRD to work with ODOT, local governments and other stakeholders to develop an action plan to complete the Oregon Coast Trail and report annually on progress toward closing gaps identified in the report.

Addressing the gaps is challenging. No one entity owns the trail. OPRD manages most but not all of the trail. Other sections are managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), and the cities through which the trail passes. Some sections — about 40 miles, or a little less than 10 percent of the entire route — are disconnected, inconvenient, unsafe or inaccessible during certain tide cycles and seasons. OPRD, ODOT, federal land managers, local governments and trail advocates continue working together to close these gaps.

Since the passage of HB 3149, federal, state, and local land management agencies, local governments, the Association of Oregon Counties, Oregon Solutions, multiple non-profit partners, and private citizens continue to work with OPRD toward completion of the trail. In 2018, we were pleased to have Representative Brock Smith and Oregon Parks and Recreation Commissioner Doug Deur agree to serve as co-conveners to lead an Oregon Solutions project helping to complete the action plan.

In December 2020, through a Federal Lands Access Program grant, a project team that now includes the Federal Highway Administration began a two-year project focused on further development of the action plan. The key tasks of this grant are to:

- Summarize existing trail conditions
- Convene stakeholders by coastal segment
- Develop stakeholder agreements on priority issues
- Analyze trail connection alignments
- Develop conceptual designs and future cost estimates
- Develop long-term maintenance and management strategies
- Identify long-term design, construction, and maintenance funding
- Establish long-term trail governance
- Share information with stakeholders on final action plan decisions

Due to the dynamic nature of the coastal environment, including considerations for natural and cultural resources, erosion, landslides, and weather, maintenance and repair of existing section of the trail will always be a challenge. However, prioritizing new sections that make the trail as safe as possible is prudent and will improve the overall experience of the OCT. While work continues on development of the action plan, as resources are available, projects to address gaps in the trail are completed. In January we were able to reopen a section of the trail in Ecola State Park. This section had been closed for five years due to a landslide. Our staff worked with partners at Trailkeepers of Oregon to rebuild and reroute the trail. When a large windstorm hit the north coast in February, three more gaps were created that we now must assess and determine a way to reopen.

In addition to allocating general funding toward projects that further completion of the Oregon Coast Trail, HB 3281-1 would dedicate up to \$1 million of the lottery funds OPRD spends on signature, recreation and scenic trails toward qualifying projects along the Oregon Coast Trail. While the department has no position on the bill, we have no objections to the inclusion of this provision.