



# Pacific Crest Trail Association

February 3, 2023

To members of the Oregon Legislature's Joint Committee on Transportation:

I write to you today for your support for SB 815.

We are in support of the proposed funding of a retrofit and strengthening of the **Bridge of the Gods**, which crosses the Columbia River between Oregon and Washington. This project by the Port of Cascade Locks, Oregon, is vital for ensuring the longevity of the bridge as an important link for interstate transportation and commerce between the states and will provide much-needed commuting and recreation access between communities on both sides of the river.

The **Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA)** supports the proposal because the bridge is the designated route of the **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT)**. This beautiful, iconic crossing in the heart of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, is the only way people can walk between the two states on the PCT.

The Port of Cascade Locks is seeking **\$6 million in transportation funding in this session** from both Washington and Oregon for its initial feasibility study, planning and design of the project. This will move the project to a construction-ready phase and allow stakeholders, including the PCTA, to engage regional partners and advocate for project funding with local communities, Congress, and the Federal Highway Administration.

Longer-term, the project will include a **bike/pedestrian lane** cantilevered off the side of the bridge. This addition will improve safety for pedestrians, horseback riders and cyclists who want to experience both sides of the Columbia River and the PCT. For decades, PCT thru-hikers have declared that the **bridge crossing was the most dangerous part** of their 2,650-mile hike from Mexico to Canada. **People on foot often are sharing narrow traffic lanes with semi-trailers and log trucks.** Leading a horse over the bridge is impossible, so stock must be trailered across this quarter-mile section.

The walkway would **increase access to state and federal lands** for recreation and tourism on both sides of the river. In 1998, 56 people completed the PCT. This year, more than 7,000 people received permits to walk 500 miles or more on the PCT. Long-distance permit numbers have been increasing annually and the trends show no signs of reversing. Distance hiking on America's National Scenic Trails is now a mainstream activity.





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Adding a walkway to the Bridge of the Gods would be a boon to the towns on either end of the bridge. Recreation tourism is an increasingly important element of the economies of both Cascade Locks, Oregon, and Stevenson, Washington. The walkway likely would become a **regional tourist destination**. The countless trails, dedicated bicycle lanes and scenic byways along both sides of the river already draw travelers who come to see the wonders of the Bonneville Dam, the Lewis and Clark Trail, the Ice Age Floods Trail, and the Historic Columbia River Highway. The bridge is an important crossroads for local commuters as well.

These small towns often struggle economically. They are special places for long-distance PCT travelers, countless day hikers and others. PCT hikers stop to rest and buy meals, supplies, and hotel rooms. **Crossing the Oregon-Washington border is a milestone**, and both towns have embraced the PCT community. Cascade Locks hosts an annual training for our trail maintenance volunteers and the PCT Days festival that draws thousands every August.

The PCTA understands the value of the towns along the trail. In 2018, we started a pilot "Trail Towns" program to tap into the energy that trail communities provide, and to ensure that we're doing what we can to help them. The trail and the towns along it share a symbiotic relationship. **Residents are trail maintenance volunteers and a source of donations** for our organization. We seek their advice on local projects and encourage PCT travelers to visit their towns and appreciate what they offer.

In 2014, the PCTA organized a bridge walk to give pedestrians a chance to enjoy the bridge without motorized traffic. It drew hundreds of people enthusiastic about the proposed walkway and raised money to kickstart the project. The PCTA, Friends of the Gorge, Lewis and Clark Trail and the Port of Cascade Locks pitched in. **The effort raised \$18,000, which paid for a study that told us this walkway was possible.**

We are working with the Port and members of the Oregon and Washington Congressional delegations to secure federal funding to build the walkway. **Support is bipartisan**. Last summer, more than 800 people signed a petition to Congress urging project funding. The initial contributions from the states to strengthen the structure will send a clear signal to the federal government that the longevity of the bridge, including the walkway project, is desired and worthwhile. I thank you for your consideration of this important project.

Mark Larabee  
Advocacy Director

