

February 1, 2016

Senate Committee on Business and
Transportation
900 Court Street Northeast
State Capitol Building
Salem, OR 97301



Re: Support for SB 1510, Sections 1-3

Dear Chair Beyer and Members of the Senate Business and Transportation Committee:

The OneGorge Advocacy Group is a network of public agencies and private businesses from Oregon and Washington communities throughout the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area working together to advocate for regional priorities. The undersigned participants of OneGorge wish to express our support for Oregon Senate Bill 1510, Sections 1-3, which stipulate that a newly constructed bridge spanning the Columbia between the cities of Hood River, Oregon and Bingen/White Salmon, Washington would be an extension of Oregon State Route 35, and urge legislative approval during the 2016 session.

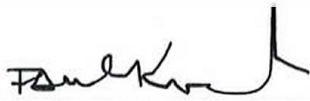
The Hood River/White Salmon Interstate Bridge was originally constructed in 1924 and has been owned and operated by the Port of Hood River since 1950. The bridge provides a vital connection between Washington and Oregon and the economic well-being of the region is dependent on this crossing situated at the heart of the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. However, the bridge is functionally obsolete. Its deficiencies include narrow travel lanes, lack of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, low load carrying capacity, substandard river channel span, and vulnerability to a seismic event. Given these deficiencies, a multi-jurisdictional effort has been underway for the long term replacement of the existing bridge.

Congress recently passed the Fixing America's Surface Transportation, or FAST Act, reauthorizing federal transportation policy and funding through 2020. The FAST Act created the "Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects Program," a new competitive grant program for so-called "megaprojects." Recognizing the need to replace the Hood River Bridge, a coalition of Oregon and Washington Congressional representatives, led by Congressman Greg Walden, worked together to ensure that language was included giving special consideration to projects in National Scenic Areas. However, in order to qualify, projects must be part of the National Highway System, or NHS. SB 1510 Sections 1-3 seeks to fulfill that requirement by stipulating that the newly constructed bridge would be an extension of Oregon Hwy 35, which is part of the National Highway System.

While the US Department of Transportation will also need to extend its NHS designation to this new segment of Hwy 35, the agency is much more likely to do so if the State legislature recognizes a new bridge in Hood River as an extension of Hwy 35. Without this designation, the bridge replacement project would not qualify for this new robust source of federal funding and would miss out on the opportunity to secure millions of dollars of federal funding to strengthen the National Scenic Area's regional economy and infrastructure.

This language aligns with federal criteria and with a statute already codified by the State of Washington to facilitate the grant application process, which could be underway before the end of 2016. This designation only applies to a future, newly constructed bridge and does nothing to impact the current Hood River Bridge or its jurisdictional status. We urge legislative approval of this concept which helps pave the way for a project that could bring more needed jobs and millions of federal dollars to the state and region.

Sincerely,
The Undersigned, facilitated by OneGorge



Paul Koch, Interim General Manager
Port of Cascade Locks



Mark Zanmiller, City Council Member
City of Hood River



Tammara Toppel, Director of Human Resources
Custom Interface, Inc.



Mike Glover
Executive Director, Hood River County Chamber of
Commerce



Michael S. McElwee, Executive Director
Port of Hood River



Paul Blackburn, Mayor
City of Hood River, OR



David Roth, Financial Advisor
Edward Jones Investments



Ken Bailey, Vice President
Orchard View, Inc.



Joyce Brake, Attorney at Law
Columbia Counsel PLLC



Nicolai Thomas
Private citizen



Gordon Zimmerman, City Administrator
City of Cascade Locks



Rich McBride, Commissioner
Port of Hood River



Mark Reynolds
Private citizen



Cheryl Park
Ascendente Winery



Maria Foley, Executive Director
Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce



Pat Albaugh, Executive Director
Skamania County Economic Development Council

Tamara Kaufman



Tamara Kaufman, Branch Office Administrator
Edward Jones

Mike Foley

Mike Foley
Private citizen

Jaco Klinkenberg



Jaco Klinkenberg, Owner
Wet Planet Whitewater

Heather Staten



Heather Staten, Executive Director
Hood River Valley Residents Committee

Becky Brun



Becky Brun, City Council Member
City of Hood River

Rosemary Hoyt

Rosemary Hoyt
Private citizen

John McSherry



John McSherry, Executive Director
Port of Skamania County

Hoby Streich

Hoby Streich, Owner
Cascade Corner, Inc.

Fred D. Duckwall



Fred Duckwall, President
Duckwall Fruit

Jon Davies



Jon Davies, Partner
Columbia River Insurance