



**TO:** Columbia River Gorge Commission

**FROM:** Krystyna U. Wolniakowski, Executive Director

**DATE:** May 10, 2016

**SUBJECT:** COMMISSION ACTION REQUESTED: Criteria for Evaluating Transportation Priorities in the National Scenic Area

**Background:**

At the February 9, 2016 Columbia River Gorge Commission meeting, the Commission approved a staff recommendation as follows:

- 1) Amend the current work plan to include .03 FTE as part of “Special Issues” to allow staff participation in the important discussions with regional partners and track the process as it relates to our management plan goals. This will require reducing time to be involved in other general categories such as general “Gorge-wide partner meetings” that serve as outreach. Staff further recommends that the Commission designates one or two Commissioners who are interested in the NSA transportation issue to also be involved in the partner meetings.
- 2) Staff also recommends that the Commission request the transportation partners to work closely with Commission staff and designated Commissioners to develop the list of criteria and priority projects within the NSA and return to the Commission in summer 2016 with their recommendations.

**Staff Follow-up:**

Staff participated in several transportation meetings with MCEDD, ports and other local and regional partners focused on “providing a safe and efficient regional transportation system to enhance the livability and economic vitality of the Mid-Columbia region” which helped staff to become more informed about current transportation priorities and plans in the region. We also had an opportunity to discuss the transportation needs/plans specifically within the NSA with the participants. In consultation with local/regional partners, we drafted a preliminary list of “criteria” that can serve as the lens by which to review existing lists of transportation projects that will have already been adopted or prepared by the various jurisdictions within the NSA in both states.

**The “Lens”**

Currently, the management plan provides guidance for some transportation priorities, but only as they relate to enhancing recreational use and improving access to and safety at recreation sites for the traveling public, with emphasis on meeting NSA recreation goals. With the need for coordinated, Gorge-wide, bi-state transportation projects, staff worked with several local representatives to develop a list of criteria that could be used to evaluate proposed projects in the NSA that would be consistent with the management plan. These criteria for reviewing and endorsing transportation projects include, but not limited to, the following:

- Enhances access to sites within the NSA
- Enhances safety and provides a positive experience for NSA visitors and residents
- Protects and enhances the scenic, natural, cultural and recreational resources in the NSA
- Supports and enhances the economic vitality of the NSA
- Is at a scale that is significant within the NSA
- Promotes alternative modes of transportation
- Benefits treaty tribes nations and has tribal support

**Commission Action Requested:**

Staff request that the Commission discuss the criteria and adopt the list as proposed, or amend the list to include additional relevant criteria.

**Next Steps:**

When the criteria are adopted, staff will meet with local and regional partners in May and June to review and categorize the proposed projects, and to propose a level of importance (high, medium, low) with the goal of finalizing recommendations within the NSA to the Gorge Commission by July 2016. Regional and local partners will request the Commission to endorse these transportation priorities identified within the NSA preferably by the July, but no later than the August Commission meeting.