



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

355 Capitol St. NE, MS 11

Salem, OR 97301

DATE: February 8, 2016

TO: Senate Committee on Business and Transportation

FROM: Paul Mather, Administrator
ODOT Highway Division

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 1510

INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 1510 directs the Oregon Department of Transportation to designate a future Hood River Bridge as a part of Oregon Route 35.

DISCUSSION

The Oregon State Legislature has given authority to the Oregon Transportation Commission to designate routes that are part of the state highway system under ORS 366.290. The commission has long used this statutory authority to designate state routes by resolution. Senate Bill 1510 directs ODOT to designate a newly constructed interstate bridge across the Columbia River in the vicinity of Hood River as part of Oregon Route 35. The change brought forward by SB 1510 circumvents the commission's statutory role, and proposes to put a single state route designation in state law. This would result in one segment of OR 35 being designated in law, while the remaining section of OR 35 and all other highways in the state are designated by an Oregon Transportation Commission resolution.

Proponents of the bill have indicated the Oregon route designation will lend state support when the Federal Highway Administration considers National Highway System designation for the bridge. Currently, the Hood River Bridge is not on the National Highway System. National Highway System routes are designated by the Federal Highway Administration, and ODOT has begun the process for recommending to FHWA, on behalf of the Port of Hood River (owner of the bridge), this designation be applied to the Hood River Bridge. ODOT has received an initial indication of support from Washington state; one criterion FHWA considers is whether there is support from affected parties. National Highway System designation and state route designation are two separate designations managed by two separate levels of government and they have to be changed independently of one another; one does not lend support to the other.

The Port of Hood River is pursuing National Highway System designation to be eligible for a new funding opportunity. The federal FAST Act, passed by Congress late last year, includes a new competitive grant program named the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects program. The main purpose of this program is to fund large (\$100 million or more) surface transportation projects that facilitate the movement of freight.

Within this broader competitive grant program, a special eligibility exists for freight-related highway and bridge projects located within National Scenic Areas. In order to take advantage of this special eligibility, highway and bridge projects within National Scenic Areas must also be located on the federally designated National Highway System. The Hood River Bridge is located within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, but it is not currently designated as a part of the National Highway System.

SUMMARY

Two distinct processes exist for NHS designation and state route designation of Oregon highways. NHS designation, not state route designation, is needed to make the Hood River Bridge eligible for federal funding under the Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects program. Senate Bill 1510 circumvents the authority given the Oregon Transportation Commission by the legislature to establish state routes.