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**BRIDGE OF THE GODS PRESERVATION FUNDING SOUGHT BY PORT OF CASCADE LOCKS**

CASCADE LOCKS, OR - As the Bridge of the Gods reaches its 98<sup>th</sup> year in service connecting the Oregon community of Cascade Locks with Stevenson and North Bonneville in Washington, the Port of Cascade Locks is thinking about its future. Despite its age, the bridge is in good working order and not in need of a full replacement like the Hood River Bridge and the I-5 Interstate Bridge. However, as with any aging piece of infrastructure, the bridge would benefit from a few key upgrades to improve safety and resilience and extend its usable life.

Built before modern seismic standards, the bridge is vulnerable to a large earthquake event and in need of a number of preservation upgrades. The Port of Cascade Locks has owned and operated the toll bridge since 1961 and is updating its 15-year maintenance plan with the help of bridge engineer David McCurry of Parsons Corporation. "For the largest projects, like the seismic retrofits and construction of a bike/pedestrian crossing, a set of feasibility studies will determine project priorities, costs, and potential construction timelines" said Brad Lorang, port commission president. "State funding support would be a tremendous help to the communities that rely on the bridge to get these planning projects done relatively quickly to ensure preservation projects can begin before there is a critical need."

The Port has made a \$6 million request to the Oregon Legislature to fund a set of seismic and preservation studies that will identify key upgrades and provide a roadmap for future improvements, including safer passage for bikes, pedestrians and horses. This funding will be considered by the Oregon Legislature next month when its short legislative session convenes on February 5<sup>th</sup>. The request is in a standalone bill within the Joint Transportation Committee, called House Bill 4110.

"The Port would like to thank our local legislators, Oregon Senator Daniel Bonham and Representative Jeff Helfrich, who have worked closely with us on this request on behalf of their constituents. They have long been champions of bridge preservation and other efforts in and around Cascade Locks," said Jeremiah Blue, port executive director. "Thank you also to the members of the Oregon Joint Transportation Committee who agreed to make our request a

committee bill to be heard in the upcoming short session. We know it is a very compressed schedule and their consideration is a generous show of support.” Mandated by the Oregon Constitution, the even-year short session will last no more than 35 days.

“The Bridge of the Gods is a critical part our region’s transportation network and I’m proud to go to bat for this funding,” said Rep. Helfrich. “An investment now extends the bridge’s usable life and provides a safer and more resilient future for interests on both sides of the river. That’s money well spent.”

“Our region’s small businesses, farmers and orchardists, residents and visitors alike all rely on the Bridge of the Gods,” said Senator Daniel Bonham. “Keeping our transportation infrastructure in good working order is a priority and I’m happy to champion this bill.”

The port has also worked closely with Washington Representative Kevin Waters of Skamania County to explore funding opportunities from across the river. As the Washington State Legislature convened on January 8, a challenging picture for new transportation project funding emerged as the legislature deals with cost overruns on large transportation projects around the state. “Keeping the Bridge of the Gods safe and reliable is a priority for folks in my district and I’ve been happy to partner with the Port of Cascade Locks as they build support for this project,” said Rep. Waters.

Said Blue, “While this session likely won’t provide an opening for funding from the State of Washington, the Port thanks Rep. Waters for his championing of this effort in past years and we’ll continue to partner to ensure folks on both sides of the river have a safe, resilient bridge they can rely on.”

A key supporter of the project is the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA), a national non-profit that advocates for the protection and maintenance of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail. Last summer, the PCTA generated more than 5,000 petition signatures from its members and the public calling for funding to begin the project.

Stretching from Mexico to Canada, the 2,650-mile trail traverses the Cascade Crest and crosses from Oregon to Washington across the Bridge of the Gods, where hikers share the narrow deck with cars and trucks. The PCT is designated for hikers and horseback riders, and a new lane for foot and bicycle traffic would allow equestrians to ride across the bridge rather than go through the time and expense of loading their animals onto trailers.

“Thru-hikers scale Sierra passes that are above 13,000 feet high, but they say walking across the Bridge of the Gods next to a log truck is the scariest part of their journey,” said Mark Larabee, the PCTA’s Advocacy Director. “This walkway also would be a boon to the communities on both sides of the river in terms of tourism and quality of life. We appreciate the bipartisan support from the Oregon Joint Transportation Committee and urge the Legislature to start the process of upgrading the bridge so it lasts another 100 years.