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**Oregon Legislature Approves \$6 Million for Bridge of the Gods**

*Funding will support Seismic Resilience, Preservation, and Safety Improvement Studies*

*Cascade Locks, Oregon* — The Oregon Legislature has taken a significant step toward ensuring the longevity of the iconic Bridge of the Gods. On Thursday, March 7th, the legislature passed its end-of-session omnibus bill, allocating general fund dollars to various projects and programs across the state. Among the provisions in the bill was a \$6 million allocation to ODOT for distribution to the Port of Cascade Locks to support engineering studies focused on seismic resilience and bridge preservation to safeguard the nearly 100-year-old bridge.

With this funding, the Port will be able to procure engineering and other services such as site and soil assessments to analyze the bridge's structural integrity to identify seismic vulnerabilities and inform targeted preservation efforts. Additionally, the studies will explore the feasibility of adding a pedestrian, bike, and equestrian lane separate from the flow of vehicle traffic to enhance safety for users, particularly those traversing the iconic Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail.

"We are very grateful that the Oregon legislature supported our project," said Albert Nance, Port Commissioner. "These studies will help us map out the future of the Bridge of the Gods and better understand the improvements needed to extend its usable life."

House Republican Leader Jeff Helfrich and Senator Daniel Bonham were strong advocates for the project during the legislative session. Representative Helfrich, who represents Oregon House District 52 and serves as House Minority Leader, played a key role in the allocation.

"We are fortunate to have Representative Helfrich and Senator Bonham represent us," said Jeremiah Blue, Port Executive Director. "Their skill and tenacity in Salem have translated into this kind of support that will make our community more resilient in the face of tremendous challenges."

"For generations, the Bridge of the Gods has facilitated crossings for Gorge communities on both sides of the Columbia River. But a lot has changed since the bridge was built in 1926 and it's time to chart the bridge's future to keep traffic flowing and our economies thriving," said Helfrich. "As leaders, it's our responsibility to do everything to strengthen and safeguard our critical infrastructure. With these investments, I want to see the bridge stand stronger than Zeus himself."

The Port plans to seek matching funds in next year's legislative session in Washington and has been working closely with Representative Kevin Waters to build support. "Rep. Waters has been so proactive in his support for bridge preservation and we are very grateful to him for all of his work in Olympia and on the ground here in the Gorge," said Port Commission President, Brad Lorang.

For several years, the Port has collaborated closely with the Pacific Crest Trail Association to advocate for the addition of a safe pedestrian and bike crossing on the bridge. The Bridge of the Gods serves as a vital

connection along the 2,650-mile Pacific Crest Trail, stretching from Mexico to Canada. Backpackers, hikers, horseback riders and other recreationists seeking to cross from Oregon to Washington currently share the bridge's narrow lanes with car and truck traffic.

"Adding a lane for foot and bike traffic will create a much safer experience not only for PCT travelers but for all the people who live and play in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area," said Mark Larabee, Advocacy Director for the Pacific Crest Trail Association. "The walkway will increase access to state and federal lands for recreation on both sides of the river and would be a boon to the developing tourism economy. We are grateful that Oregon legislators see the value in this project."

After narrowly missing out on funding during the 2023 session, the Port worked closely with leadership from the Joint Transportation Committee to present another funding request during the 2024 short session. "The Port also wants to thank the members of the Joint Transportation Committee for their leadership and support of our bill, especially committee Co-Chairs Representative Susan McLain and Senator Chris Gorsek, and Vice-Chairs Representative Shelly Boshart Davis and Senator Brian Boquist," said Blue.

This year's funding request was initially considered by the Legislature's Joint Transportation Committee during a hearing in February. Supportive testimony, both in person and through submitted statements, was delivered by a multitude of local and statewide groups, including Hood River County, the City of Cascade Locks, the Mid-Columbia Economic Development District, the Columbia River Gorge Commission, and the Oregon Public Ports Association and was instrumental in demonstrating local backing.

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*Pictured below: Oregon House Minority Leader Jeff Helfrich, photo credit Port of Cascade Locks*

