

February 9, 2021

Joint Committee on Transportation
900 Court St., NE
Salem, OR 97301

Re: Support for Willamette Falls Locks Authority as public corporation

Co-Chairs Senator Beyer and Representative McLain and Members,

I am writing to express Travel Oregon's support for establishing the Willamette Falls Locks Authority as a public corporation. As the agency responsible for optimizing the state's multi-billion dollar tourism industry, Travel Oregon is strongly supportive of projects that will allow increased multi-modal access to Oregon's outdoor recreation resources, including the Willamette River Trail. It's no surprise that outdoor recreation in Oregon has been a key component in driving the economic impact of our state's tourism economy.

A recent study done in partnership by Travel Oregon, Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, the Oregon Office of Outdoor Recreation, Oregon Fish and Wildlife, and Earth Economics, found that the state's outdoor recreation industry (including manufacturing and retail sales) generates \$15.6 billion in consumer spending annually, employs 224,000 Oregonians in full and part-time jobs, and generates \$552 million in state and local tax revenue. For cities along the Willamette River, including Oregon City, Salem and Corvallis, investment in the Willamette Falls Locks will provide a connected corridor that powers a large economic engine for local communities through outdoor recreation. The Willamette Falls Locks Commission 2018 economic impact study found that the quantified benefits associated with recreation, including overnight cruises and use by personal watercrafts (motorboats, kayaks, etc.) range from about \$12 to over \$50 million over 30 years.

Many visitors travel to the state with plans to recreate in Oregon's diverse and scenic outdoors. In fact, according to a 2017 study, of the 26.4 million overnight visitors to Oregon, 33% (nearly 9 million) participated in some form of outdoor recreation during their visit. Travel Oregon works to drive overnight stays in Oregon. It is crucial we provide access to our natural treasures for our visitors and residents. Additionally, recent stakeholder outreach efforts identified a need to develop world-class tourism-related development projects, such as the Willamette Falls Locks project. The Willamette Falls Locks provide a new tourism product that not only connects rural communities along the Willamette River to Portland's robust tourism market, but also provides additional access to the river corridor which will help disperse visitation in high-use areas. This project ties well with Travel Oregon's Willamette River Trail tourism studio, as it increases river connectivity and will allow for an enhanced and expanded visitor experience for outdoor recreation user groups.

Travel Oregon supports establishing the Willamette Falls Locks Authority as a public corporation so that the project can move forward and increase access along the Willamette River corridor – a project that will result in the creation of additional visitor experiences and economic opportunities for communities south of the Portland metro area. This project serves long-term goals of economic development, historical tourism opportunities, and arts and cultural investments. It will increase access to the Willamette River corridor to provide guests and residents with the opportunity to experience the awe-inspiring sights of our natural lands for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Todd Davidson
CEO, Travel Oregon