COLUMBIA GORGE

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Hood River, Klickitat, Sherman, Skamania, and Wasco Counties

2022–2027

MID-COLUMBIA REGION

SEATTLE

WASHINGTON

COLUMBIA RIVER

OREGON

PORTLAND

SKAMANIA

KLICKITAT

HOOD RIVER

WASCO

SHERMAN

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Five counties in two states sharing a common workforce, geography, and economic development challenges and opportunities.

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INTRODUCTION

PC: Saul Reynoso

Every five years the region develops the comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) as a guide to understanding the regional economy and crafting goals, strategies and actions to create jobs, raise income levels, diversify the economy, and improve the quality of life.

Economic development planning as implemented through the CEDS successfully serves as a means to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration.

The plan is compiled by Mid-Columbia Economic Development District (MCEDD) and follows the guidelines required by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA). The strategy was developed over seven monthly meetings in 2021 with more than 100 participants throughout the series, including local and tribal governments, regional partners, ports, chambers, legislators, state and federal partners, businesses and individuals.

The strategy also incorporates additional feedback from online surveys and focus groups held with our Latino/a/Hispanic and Native American communities. Throughout this process we explored the themes of *resilience and equitable outcomes* *(see sidebar).*

The following sections form the foundation of the strategy:

- Summary of regional economic conditions

- Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis

- Action plans

- Evaluation framework

The CEDS process was overseen by a Steering Committee and the strategy is adopted by the MCEDD Board of Directors. See Appendix A for a list of key strategy leadership, and Appendix B for a list of strategy participants.
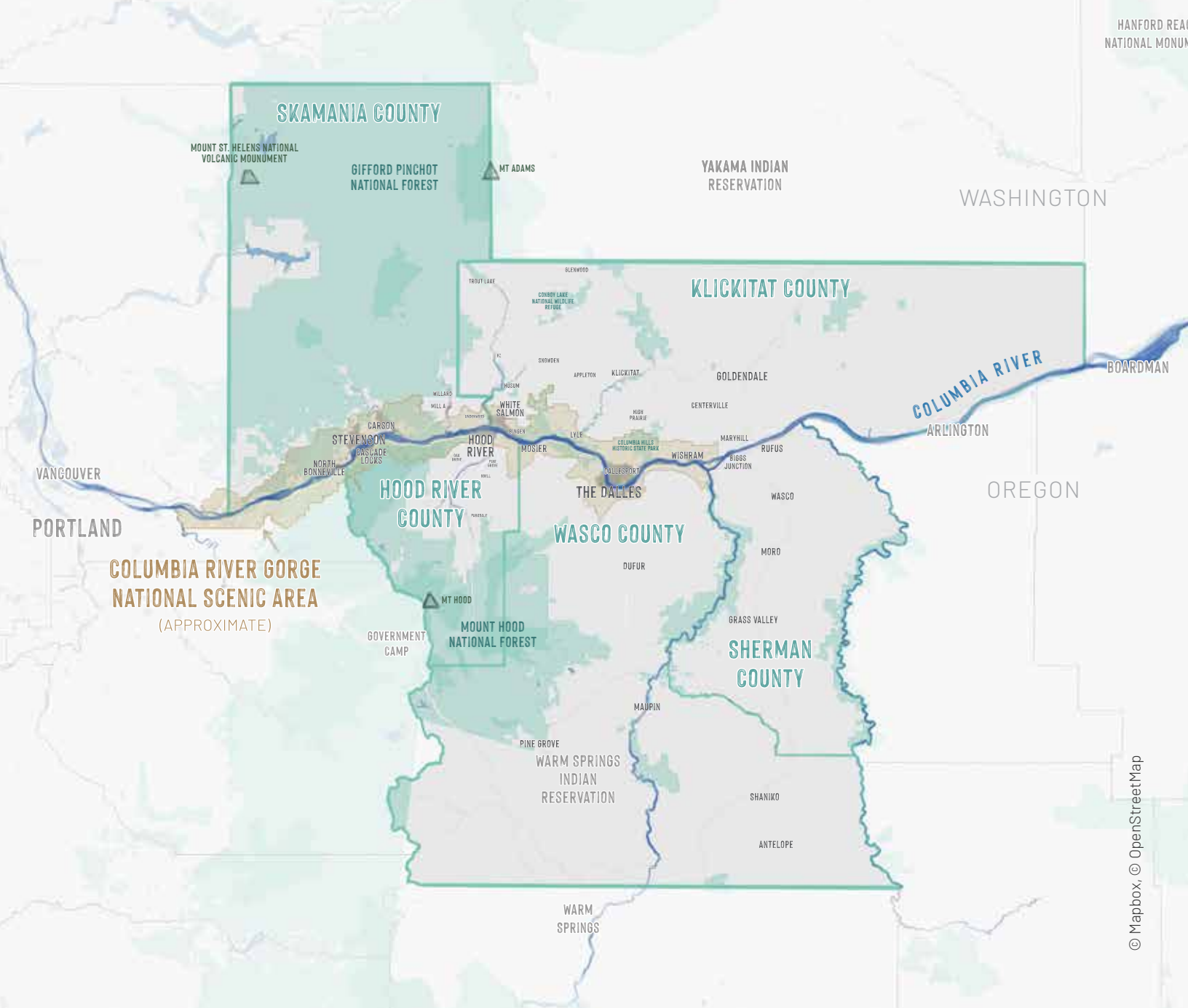
What is Resilience?

The Economic Development Administration (EDA) defines resilience as "the ability to recover quickly from a shock, the ability to withstand a shock, and the ability to avoid the shock altogether. Establishing economic resilience in a local or regional economy requires the ability to anticipate risk, evaluate how that risk can impact key economic assets, and build a responsive capacity."

For the Columbia Gorge, that means working with partners to develop an economy where businesses and communities are prepared for and have the resources to anticipate, plan for and respond to economic shocks, such as natural disasters, disease outbreaks, or man-made disruptions.

What are Equitable Outcomes?

The intention in considering equitable outcomes through this CEDS update is in recognition that not everyone in the region has access to the benefits of a strong regional economy. The CEDS update is an opportunity for MCEDD and regional partners to consider where there are gaps in economic opportunity, barriers to accessing this benefit that may vary by population or community, and ways to support improving outcomes. Considering that COVID-19 job losses were greater for women and people of color, considering equitable outcomes as we recover is even more imperative.

SKAMANIA COUNTY

MOUNT ST. HELENS NATIONAL
VOLCANIC MOUNUMENT

GIFFORD PINCHOT
NATIONAL FOREST

MT ADAMS

YAKAMA INDIAN
RESERVATION

WASHINGTON

HANFORD REAC
NATIONAL MONUM

GLENWOOD

TROUT LAKE

CONBOY LAKE
NATIONAL WILDLIFE
REFUGE

KLICKITAT COUNTY

COLUMBIA RIVER

BOARDMAN

FC

SNOWDEN

APPLETON

KLICKITAT

GOLDENDALE

HUSUM

WILLARD

MILL A

UNDERWOOD

WHITE
SALMON

BINGEN

LYLE

CENTERVILLE

HIGH
PRAIRIE

COLUMBIA HILLS
HISTORIC STATE PARK

MARYHILL

ARLINGTON

CARSON

STEVENSON

CASCADE
LOCKS

HOOD
RIVER

OAK
GROVE

MOSIER

WISHRAM

BIGGS
JUNCTION

RUFUS

NORTH
BONNEVILLE

PORT
GROVE

DALLESPORT

VANCOUVER

ODELL

THE DALLES

WASCO

OREGON

PORTLAND

HOOD RIVER
COUNTY

PARKDALE

WASCO COUNTY

MORO

COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE
NATIONAL SCENIC AREA
(APPROXIMATE)

DUFUR

MT HOOD

GOVERNMENT
CAMP

MOUNT HOOD
NATIONAL FOREST

GRASS VALLEY

SHERMAN
COUNTY

MAUPIN

PINE GROVE

WARM SPRINGS
INDIAN
RESERVATION

SHANIKO

ANTELOPE

WARM
SPRINGS

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REGIONAL ECONOMIC CONDITIONS SUMMARY

GEOGRAPHY

MCEDD's region includes five counties bordering the Columbia River Gorge in Oregon and Washington. The region partially encompasses the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The region is largely rural, although its proximity to the Portland Metro area and abundance of recreational opportunities brings thousands of tourists to the region every year. In total, the area spans 7,289 square miles.
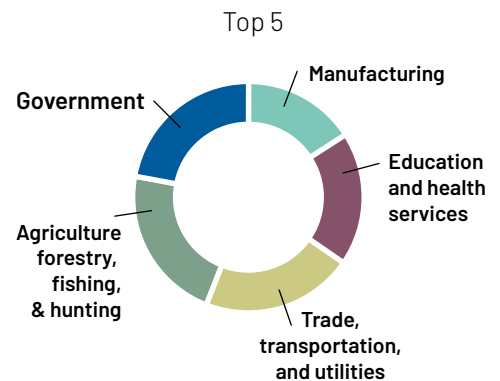
REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

The region is closely connected to urban markets. With a central location in the Pacific Northwest, the region acts as the "Center of the Hub" with direct access to metro areas and the ability to do business on an international scale.

The region has strong culture and history and has been a trading center for millennia. It has ongoing tribal relationships with four Treaty Tribes: Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, Nez Perce Tribe, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs, and Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation.
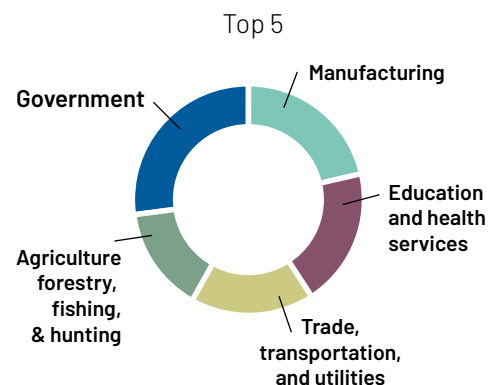
ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS

Traditional foundations of the regional economy across counties correspond with geographic differences that affect the agricultural economy, forest products industry, power generation system, tourism, and recreational activities. Additional key industry clusters include high tech, manufacturing and healthcare.

Major Industries by Jobs: 2020

Top 5

Government · Manufacturing · Education and health services · Trade, transportation, and utilities · Agriculture forestry, fishing, & hunting

Major Industries by Payroll: 2020

Top 5

Government · Manufacturing · Education and health services · Trade, transportation, and utilities · Agriculture forestry, fishing, & hunting

2020 Total Population	2020 Labor Force Population	Unemployment Rate
87,288	**43,871**	**4.4%** Trending down (Oct 2021, seasonally adjusted)

SOCIOECONOMIC DATA

Race and Ethnicity: 72.2% of the region's population identified their race as white-alone (2020 Census). 5.2% identify as having two or more races and 2% identify as American Indian and Alaska Native alone. For ethnicity data, 18.3% of the five-county population identifies as Hispanic/Latino/a, with the highest percentages in Hood River County and Wasco Counties (30% and 19% respectively). This makes the region largely resemble the two states but with *a greater share of American Indian and Hispanic/Latino/a residents*.

Age: The region's *population is aging*. As of 2019, 20% of the population was 65+ with this figure projected to grow significantly in the coming years.

Veteran Status: The region has a *higher percentage of veterans* (11%) than the averages for the US (7%), Oregon (9%), and Washington (9%).

Growth: From 2009 to 2019, population grew 7% in the MCEDD region (with Hood River and Klickitat Counties experiencing the highest growth) but housing only grew by 6.3%, making the *housing market even tighter*. Growth in some counties happened mostly outside of incorporated areas, adding pressure on infrastructure systems. Additionally, while the number of firms, employment and wages grew in the MCEDD region, growth was slower than that of Oregon or Washington as a whole.

Broadband: Access in homes has been steadily increasing, ranging from over 77% in Sherman and Wasco Counties to 82% in Hood River County. The average is 80% for the region versus 86% in Oregon and 88% in Washington. Broadband speeds have been increasing in higher populated areas including The Dalles and White Salmon, however the region's median download and upload speeds are still far below the Speedtest.net reported national average of 131.16 and 19.18 Mbps respectively. The recommended minimum speed for functional broadband is 25 Mbps download and at least 3 Mbps upload. Our Washington counties have limited data on broadband speeds but it seems regional download speeds range from 45.31 Mbps to 8.07 Mbps and upload speeds range from 8.45 Mbps to 0.58 Mbps.

Educational Attainment: The MCEDD region is keeping pace in the percentage of the population with an associate's degree, but falls behind in measurements of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher. Looking at longer trends, our percentage of those with bachelor's degrees or higher is increasing in a positive direction.

Mean Travel Time to Work: This number ranges from an average of 18 minutes in Wasco County to 30 minutes in Skamania County.

Income: The region's per capita personal income was $30,780, versus the US at $34,103, Oregon at $33,763, and Washington at $38,915 (2019 ACS 5-yr). For median household income, the regional average of $58,162 is below that of Oregon ($62,818) and Washington ($73,775). Hood River County alone had household income slightly above its state average ($65,679).

Poverty Rates: *The regional poverty rate continues to slowly decline,* now at 11.3%. This compares to Oregon at 13.3% and Washington at 10.8%. Klickitat County has the highest rate at 15.6%.

Housing: *Housing unit development has increased* over the last few years with 682 units built from January 2020 through September 2021, largely as single-family units. Klickitat County saw the largest growth (239 of the total). Considering cost-burdened renters, percentages have slightly decreased in all but Klickitat County over the last ten years. *Median home prices in most of our countries continued to soar through the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**See Appendix C for additional data.**

COVID-19 IMPACTS

This strategy was developed as the COVID-19 pandemic continued, necessitating all process meetings be virtual and shifting the picture of our economy.

In early 2021, MCEDD conducted a COVID-19 Economic Needs Assessment to determine local needs and priorities, understand the impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic, and identify opportunities for future collaboration around these issues. Through interviews, community meetings, and survey responses MCEDD identified several priority goals for recovery, as well as strategies to address them (see sidebar).

In the Columbia Gorge, job losses were experienced in all industries but leisure/ hospitality was the most vulnerable industry, with more than 40% of jobs lost in some Gorge counties. While large amounts of state and federal funds for small business relief were distributed, some small businesses did not survive. COVID-19 also shined a spotlight on the importance of and lack of broadband and accessible childcare in the region. Additionally, around 5.25 Million people nationally left the workforce during the pandemic, including more than 3 Million Baby Boomers who retired early.

Employment Change Since February 2020
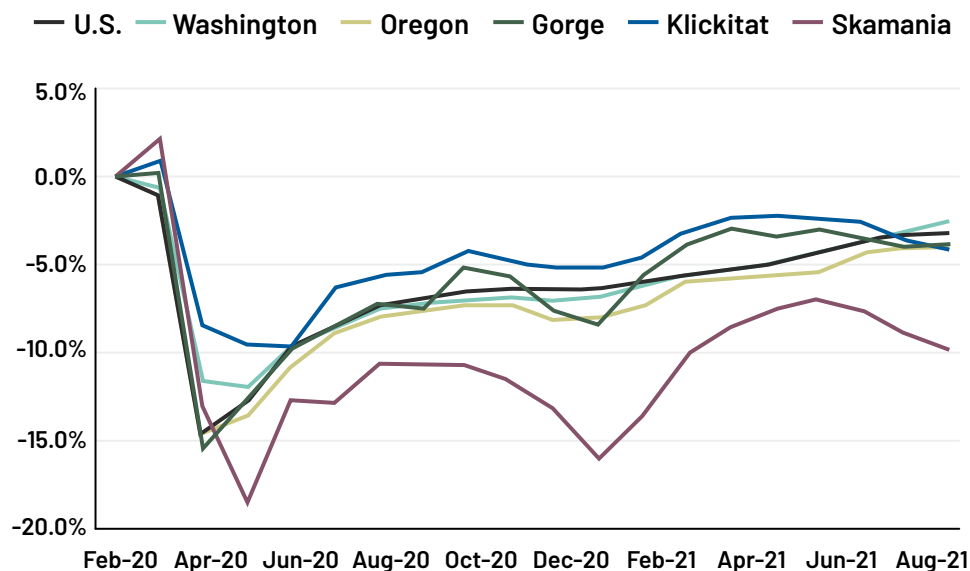
Source: BLS, state employment departments (provided by WAESD)

Recovery in the region continues to be impacted by childcare constraints, a workforce shortage, and national and international supply chain issues caused by the pandemic.

RECOVERY PRIORITIES FROM THE COLUMBIA GORGE COVID-19 ECONOMIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Small Business Support: Targeted support for small businesses as they recover and grow, with a focus on those most impacted.

Expanded Broadband Capacity: Expand broadband capacity throughout the region to meet the needs of rural residents who lack access to high-speed internet.

Attainable Housing: Work with partners to develop strategies that address housing availability and affordability for the local workforce.

Improved Transportation Networks: Build on the robust Gorge Transit Strategy to improve transportation options and increase access for rural residents.

Accessible Childcare: Work with community partners to address local gaps in childcare and create affordable options that support middle-to-low-income earners.

Workforce Development: Engage partners in industry, workforce development groups, and higher education to develop training programs that build skills for higher wage jobs.

Regional Resilience Planning: Leverage the robust response to the pandemic to build resiliency planning networks to prepare businesses, organizations, and residents for future economic shocks and disruptions.

SWOT ANALYSIS & ASSET MAPPING

Strengths / Assets

Scenic Beauty, Recreation, Brand and Tourism Industry

- Designated National Scenic Area
- Strong tourism industry
- Four season outdoor recreation
- Natural ecosystem diversity

Central Location

- National and global reliance on the Gorge as a transportation corridor
- Access to urban areas

Regional Collaboration

- Strong social fabric with bi-state networks
- Spirit of collaboration and advocacy
- Strong sense of community
- Strong local leadership and regional entities
- Active industry alliances

Infrastructure

- Telecommunication and broadband capacity in urban areas
- Abundant, clean power
- Water

Natural Resources

- Natural resource base
- Availability of renewable energy sources

Human Capital & Entrepreneurial Spirit

- Available talent with diverse skill sets
- Educational attainment
- Unique educational programs supported by businesses
- Access to education

Diverse and Growing Industry Sectors

- Diverse industries
- Growing industry sectors (unmanned systems, value-added ag, manufacturing, fermentation, healthcare)
- Strong agricultural base
- Access to capital, with additional funds from NSA

Culture

- 10,000+ years of important Indigenous culture and history
- Increased diversity

Availability of Transportation Systems/ Modes

- Interstates and highways E/W and N/S
- Airports
- Rail service
- Columbia River access
- Bicycle/ pedestrian/ transit

Weaknesses

Regulatory Environment

- Restrictions imposed by National Scenic Area constraints
- Federal and state lands not providing taxable base
- Impacts on development
- Zoning restrictions
- Length of time for permitting decisions

Disparities Between States

- Differences in regulations
- Differences in funding

Insufficient and Expensive Housing Stock for Rent and Purchase

- Insufficient housing for local employees
- Availability of affordable and attainable housing
- Land availability

Transportation

- Mobility: Gaps in public transportation options
- Gaps in bike/ped infrastructure
- Capacity of roads, bridges, airports, rail, etc. for maintenance & expansion
- Long commutes for workforce

Infrastructure

- Aging infrastructure
- Broadband capacity regionally and in rural areas
- Challenges with high-capacity tourism

Education and Skilled Workforce

- Quality/ funds for pre-K to 12 and higher ed
- Lack of childcare options
- Limited skilled labor
- Workforce training
- Aging population
- Brain drain

Lack of Business Expansion Space

- Available and attractive commercial and industrial spaces
- Lack of shovel-ready land availability

Preparedness

- Emergency preparedness
- Resilience
- Infrastructure that can withstand hazards

High Poverty Rate/ Economic Disparity

- Income inequality
- Low wages when compared to cost of living
- Inequities

Opportunities

Adjusting Tourism, Expanding Arts and Culture

- Improve tourism year-round, and into less traveled areas
- Strong arts sector
- Preserves rural character
- Highlight multicultural strengths

Connectivity

- Federal investment and further local investment in broadband accessibility
- Completion of Historic Highway

Synergy Across State Lines

- Coordination between business sectors
- Enhance industry associations
- Regional planning and capacity
- Leverage investment

Public Transportation

- Utilization of new technologies
- Expanding fixed routes
- Expanding regional transit connections
- Diversify transit options

Leverage Natural Assets

- Wood and forestry products innovation
- Diverse renewable energy and energy storage
- Fishing industry

Workforce Development

- Upskilling local workforce
- Focus on youth including internships
- Regional education initiatives to address wealth gap
- Explore childcare models/ expand apprenticeships

Growth of Value-Added Ag and Ag Tech Businesses

- Value-added ag
- New food processing
- Ag tech and research

Quality of Life

- Increased equity and access
- Higher wage jobs
- Embracing the changing economy and related

Business/ Talent Attraction

- Support for entrepreneurs
- Leverage Gorge brand to attract aligned businesses
- Potential to attract employee talent
- Remote work

Threats

Impacts of Continued Population Growth

- Limited infrastructure capacity to accommodate
- Overuse of resources
- Degradation of popular destination areas
- Increased residential development in unincorporated areas

Regulations

- Changing business regulations
- Federal agency impact and natural resource management

Housing Shortage Impacts

- Availability/ affordability reduces ability to attract and retain workers
- Impacts businesses' decisions about expanding
- Gentrification
- Increase of vacation homes

Infrastructure Limitations

- Bridges, highways, roads
- Transit capacity/ gaps
- Overused infrastructure
- Water/ wastewater
- Limited existing buildings and industrial land

Industry Diversification

- Loss of any major employer
- Over-reliance on tourism industry (low wages, no benefits)
- Concentration risk

Hazards/ Climate Change/ Resilience

- Droughts, wildfires, severe storms
- Over-reliance on Portland Metro area for essential supplies (food, fuel, internet)
- Aging emergency response systems

Education and Workforce

- Educational system challenges
- Lack of skilled workforce in trades to support replacing retirees
- Poverty; wage stagnation
- Lack of hospitality employees
- Increase in remote work
- New employer recruitment

Water Access and Regulations

- Drought impacts
- Impacts of water regulation
- Access issues
- Supply concerns

Decision Making

- Prioritizing certain sectors of the economy
- Loss of control over local decision making

REGIONAL VISION & GOALS

The Columbia Gorge CEDS was developed to address regional priorities and needs. The following Vision, Goals and corresponding Action Plans were developed from: review of past CEDS documents, other regional plans, community meetings, surveys and focus groups.

VISION

A bi-state Mid-Columbia region with a resilient, thriving, sustainable, rural economy that supports equitable access to diverse business opportunities that act in harmony with the area's unique qualities, values, cultural and natural resources.

GOALS

Strong Businesses: Enhance business innovation, retention and expansion, and entrepreneurship through more accessible support services and capital, diversifying our industry mix, and enhanced coordination to address barriers to growth and sustainability.

Robust Workforce: Cultivate a talented, multicultural workforce through diverse, family-wage career training aligned with industry needs while providing essential infrastructure supports for workforce participation in each community.

Resilient Infrastructure: Ensure communities and businesses of the Gorge have reliable, resilient access to infrastructure, including attainable housing, high-capacity broadband, sustainable sources of energy, and emergency services, among others, to support future population demands and economic opportunities.

Powerful Regional Collaboration: Increase collaboration and advocacy as a bi-state region to meet the economic needs of our communities.

Strong Businesses

> Enhance business innovation, retention and expansion, and entrepreneurship through equitable access to support services and capital, diversifying our industry mix, and enhanced coordination to address barriers to growth and sustainability.

OVERVIEW

Mid-Columbia region has weathered the last several recessions better than the two states as a result of the diversity of businesses in the region. By working to strengthen several diverse industry sectors, our region improves its resiliency towards economic shocks. The future of businesses in the region will only be stronger if we build on our abilities to supporting the development of new businesses through entrepreneurship programs, encourage research and development, foster the growth of existing businesses, focus supports on minority- and women-owned businesses, and continue to diversify our industry sectors. Our key industry sectors include:

Natural Resources and Value-Added Agriculture: Crop production (cherries, pears, apples, wheat, and grapes) and processing continues to be one of our largest employers and an essential base industry, although wages are generally low. Forest/wood products, another key base industry, has seen job declines but there is potential for growth from new products and utilization of byproducts. Innovation through value-added products can drive job growth in higher wage areas and bring more value to the region's key agricultural and forest products.

Manufacturing / Beverage Manufacturing: Manufacturing growth in the region is very strong, especially in beverage manufacturing, and provides higher-wage job opportunities. Supporting business expansion and entrepreneurship is important to this sector.

Tech: Unmanned Systems: The sector includes a focus on unmanned systems as the region is a national leading Unmanned Systems hub driven by a local industry heavy-weight and deep breadth in the local supply chain. The industry is a major job producer with a high average wage and is also the source of much of the innovation in the region. Supporting diversification and continued adaptation in this sector is key.

Healthcare: The region has invested heavily in healthcare from our major hospitals to a number of independent practitioners. Healthcare services remains a top employer throughout the region and represents a diversity of jobs types, including many with high wages. Supporting recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and growth as our population ages is crucial to the regional economy.

Utilities and Renewable Energy: The region is already an important center for utilities and renewable energy production by virtue of the hydropower facilities along the Columbia River, extensive investment into wind development and employment within our utilities. Our natural potential to participate in a broader range of renewables make our region a center for energy generation. Greater development in this sector also improves our regional resilience.

Art/Culture/Tourism/Recreation: Tourism is a primary industry sector by virtue of the number of jobs it provides and growth in the sector, but it does not meet wage goals. This sector encompasses initiatives to invest in the quality of tourism sites and visitor infrastructure, spread visitors around the region, and increase resiliency.

Strong Businesses Action Plan

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 1: Coordinate marketing efforts to increase awareness of existing business resources, including spaces, lending, technical assistance, and others.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
1.1 Collate information and resources related to business support in one place, in English and Spanish. Strengthen regular communication between leadership of entities providing business support or referring interested parties to ensure consistent messaging.	Chambers, MCEDD, The Next Door, Business OR, Ports, SBDC, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Annual Check In
1.2 Deploy materials to banks, chambers, and other entities working with businesses and strengthen networks.	Chambers, MCEDD, The Next Door, Business OR, Ports, SBDC, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Ongoing
1.3 Build creative marketing campaigns that share information in a compelling format (such as business owner testimonials). This includes a social media campaign to expand presence of economic development agencies.	Chambers, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
1.4 Use existing community newsletters to promote opportunities and spread economic development information.	Chambers, The Next Door, MCEDD, industry associations, CGCC, local news	Short, Ongoing
1.5 Increase person-to-person interactions to facilitate accessibility of materials about various business resources.	Chambers, MCEDD, The Next Door, Business OR, Ports, SBDC, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Mid
1.6 Foster business access to Chambers of Commerce and Small Business Development Center (prioritize minority-owned businesses).	Chambers, MCEDD, The Next Door, Business OR, Ports, SBDC, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 2: Develop and enhance access to business space.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
2.1 Create opportunities for businesses to coordinate and partner together to access real estate opportunities.	Chambers, MCEDD, The Next Door, Business OR, Ports, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Ongoing
2.2 Collect and distribute information on existing vacant properties. Facilitate connections with interested individuals and groups of businesses. Facilitate in-person connections with businesses to view available properties.	Business OR, Chambers, Ports	Short, Ongoing
2.3 Develop flexible, affordable incubator space.	Ports	Mid to Long
2.4 Facilitate industrial site readiness, remediation, and expedited permitting (examples: regional wetlands permit, energy overlay zone).	Ports, county, city, MCEDD, Skamania EDC, state and federal agencies, Chambers	Short, Ongoing
2.5 Support localized decision-making for business siting that will allow for clear and early guidance in the siting process. Advocate for adequate funding to City and County planning offices to help them operate efficiently and predictably.	Legislative action teams and advocacy groups	Short, Ongoing
2.6 Examine land efficiency in the ratio of houses to family wage jobs, efficiency of use of infrastructure.	TBD	Long

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
2.7 Develop additional community kitchens around fish processing. Use the facilities as a site to provide education and training for safe food handling of fish.	CRITFC, Ports	Mid
2.8 Further develop value-added agriculture opportunities and support for local produce needs, including support for a food hub concept and development of more cold storage.	Gorge Grown Food Network, MCEDD, Ports, Business OR	Short

Strategy 3: Further develop and advocate for a local Business Support Network with accessible opportunities for businesses to develop skills and access resources, particularly around innovation and retention, in English and Spanish.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
3.1 Leverage existing institutions to host and expand events, including business boot camps, workshops, and trainings. Host events specifically for Native American businesses, Latino/a/Hispanic businesses.	Business OR, Ports, MCEDD, The Next Door, Skamania EDC, Chambers, SBDC, CRITFC, libraries, Workforce Investment Boards, industry associations	Short
3.2 Develop and support small business cohorts to access mentorship, collaborate, and advocate for needs.		
3.2.1 Utilize existing industry and business alliances like chambers and those for tech, tourism, wine, beer, food production.	Business OR, Ports, MCEDD, The Next Door, Skamania EDC, Chambers, SBDC, CRITFC, industry associations	Short
3.2.2 Develop a Latino/a/Hispanic Business Alliance.	The Next Door, SBDC, MCEDD	Mid
3.2.3 Develop a Tribal Business Alliance.	CRITFC, The Next Door, Nch'i Wana, SBDC, MCEDD	Mid
3.3 Advocate for sustainable funding for the SBDC in the Gorge's Oregon and Washington counties.	SBDC, Counties, ports, MCEDD, partners	Short, Ongoing
3.4 Increase SCORE access in the Gorge and recruit more locally-based SCORE counselors.	SBDC, Chambers	Mid
3.5 Provide technical assistance tools for non-profits	Nonprofit Association, MCEDD	Mid

Strategy 4: Identify and address barriers and opportunities at the industry-sector level to support industry cluster development with specific focus on target industries listed in the plan.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
4.1 Engage with State sector leads at Washington Department of Commerce and Business Oregon to cultivate a clear understanding and support for vibrant regional industry sectors.	Industry Association, County Ec Dev, MCEDD, Skamania EDC, East Cascades Works	Short, Ongoing

Strong Businesses Action Plan

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
4.2 Support existing industry alliance: High Tech.	Gorge Tech Alliance	Short, Ongoing
a) Update strategic plan for the sector.		
b) Provide technical assistance on supply chain logistics. Recruit relevant companies, in coordination with county and Port leads.		
c) Advocate for resolution on regulatory issues, in partnership with industry.		
4.3 Support existing industry alliance: Tourism.	Columbia Gorge Visitor's Association, State Travel, Chambers	Short, Ongoing
a) Invest in the quality of tourism sites and visitor infrastructure.		
b) Focus on efforts to spread tourists around the region.		
c) Focus on tourism activities that are compatible with primary industry sectors and preserve the region's rural character.		
4.4 Support existing industry alliance: Manufacturing.	Breweries in the Gorge, Columbia Gorge Winegrowers Association, MCEDD, SBDC, East Cascades Works	Short, Ongoing
a) Further develop industry associations to support knowledge creation and exchange and maintain a network of technologists, entrepreneurs and businesses in the sectors.		
b) Identify resources for collective marketing and branding of the region for these industries.		
c) Identify shared distribution opportunities.		
d) Disseminate best available techniques for sustainability within the sector.		
e) Support individual technical projects involving the sector.		
4.5 Support existing industry alliance: Natural Resources and Value-Added Agriculture.	Gorge Grown Food Network, Columbia Gorge Fruit Growers, Forest Collaboratives, private industry, Gorge Winegrowers Association, MCEDD, SBDC, East Cascades Works	Short, Ongoing
a) Identify shared distribution opportunities.		
b) Support individual technical projects involving the sector.		
c) Identify opportunities to support retention of local land ownership, avoiding fragmentation of land and supporting succession planning resources.		
d) Support efforts that focus on forest collaboration, stewardship and innovation within this sector.		
e) Support advocacy for key regulatory issues affecting this sector.		

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

4.6 Support existing industry alliance: Renewable Energy
 	
   a) Provide a forum for communication and information dissemination; cross jurisdictional partnerships.
   b) Support intensive clean and green tech R/D, including renewable H2 fuel.
   c) Continue to fund projects/programs to increase energy efficiency.
	Columbia Gorge Bi-State Renewable Energy Zone, Hood River County Energy Council, counties, state depts, private industry, East Cascades Works	Short, Ongoing

4.7 Support efforts in growing industry sectors: Healthcare a) Support efforts to connect and advance the healthcare sector, including those identified in the community health assessment	Columbia Gorge Health Council Community Advisory Committee, private industry, East Cascades Works	Mid

Strategy 5: Attract new businesses.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
5.1 Promote the region as a place to do business for diverse sectors, focusing on available industrial land. Target businesses whose jobs are attainable for the existing local labor force.	Chambers, Ports, Business Oregon, MCEDD, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Ongoing
5.2 Attract new entrepreneurs that will support local market needs.	Chambers, Ports, Business Oregon, MCEDD, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Mid
5.3 Attract energy-intensive industries attempting to expand their use of green energy sources.	Chambers, Ports, Business Oregon, MCEDD, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Mid

Strategy 6: Increase locally available access to capital for entrepreneurs.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
6.1 Advocate for more funding into locally managed capital access programs with increased investment from foundation funders and government entities.	MCEDD, SBDC, partners	Short, Ongoing

6.2 Provide education for businesses seeking to use alternative financing mechanisms including:
 	
   a) Community Public Offerings (CPO)
   b) New Market Tax Credits programs (NMTC)
   c) Crowdfunding platforms
	MCEDD, SBDC, partners	Mid

6.3 Address barriers to women and minorities accessing capital resources.	MCEDD, The Next Door, commercial lenders	Short, Ongoing
6.4 Advocate for financial incentives for target industry cluster businesses.	Business OR, WA Commerce	Long
6.5 Explore development of local angel and venture capital networks.	TBD	Long

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
6.6 Increase funding for Individual Development Account (IDA) programs.	The Next Door, MCHA, MCEDD, SBDC	Mid

Strategy 7: Increase the ease of navigating the financial system.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
7.1 Host an annual lenders conference.	MCEDD, private industry, USDA, CDFI network, foundations	Short, Ongoing
7.2 Provide capital coaches through SBDC and MCEDD.	SBDC, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
7.3 Connect new loan programs through MCEDD and Skamania EDC to retain an easy to navigate (and sustainable) system.	MCEDD, Skamania EDC, partners	Mid

Strategy 8: Increase opportunities for businesses to export products.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
8.1 Identify Investment and Trade Leakages to support identification of export opportunities and encourage business expansions. Conduct a trade leakage study.	US Export Assistance, EDA, MCEDD, Ports	Long
8.2 Host Export Training Workshops. Provide resources for businesses to expand their export potential.	County Economic Development, Ports, US Export Assistance, Business OR, WA Commerce	Mid

Robust Workforce

> Cultivate a talented, multicultural workforce through diverse, family-wage career training aligned with industry needs while providing essential infrastructure supports for workforce participation in each community.

OVERVIEW

The region recognizes the critical role of a qualified workforce in addressing sustained economic growth of the region. In educational attainment, the MCEDD region is keeping pace in the percentage of the population with an Associate's degree, but falls behind in measurements of individuals with a bachelor's degree or higher. The primary avenue to address the need for a skilled workforce is through support to enhance and expand upon existing services, with a long-term vision for developing new resources. Needs include:

Childcare: The lack of childcare access and its importance to robust workforce participation became particularly apparent during COVID-19. Developing more capacity in this area and affordable options is crucial to continued economic growth.

Pre-K to Grade 12: The pre-K-12 system in the region is the primary provider for basic skills development. Strong math and literacy skills developed at an early age can set the trajectory for lifelong success.

Basic Skills Training: Basic skill requirements and the workforce quality for entry level positions needs improvement. With a constantly evolving economy, talent in the region must be able to rapidly adjust to new occupations using transferable skills sets. The region seeks to match the needs of businesses with available skills trainings, and to provide training that focuses on our minority communities.

Higher Education: Local community colleges are responsive to industry's needs with cornerstone programs which have supported the region's economic development initiatives. These programs will continue to play a vital role in workforce adaptation.

Quality Workplaces: With a very low regional unemployment rate, the tight labor market is creating competition for qualified workers. Thus, quality of the workplace becomes paramount for employers to retain and provide growth opportunities for skilled workers.

Bi-State Workforce: As a bi-state area, we share a common workforce and require collective training opportunities and a regional system in Oregon and Washington.

Robust Workforce Action Plan

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 1: Enhance workforce tools to support area employers.

1.1 Support and celebrate employer efforts that increase respect and dignity of workers.	EC Works, CGCC, WorkSource, public and private industry, industry associations, The Next Door, OHDC, OCDC, Nch'i Wana, Native American Youth and Family Center	Short, Ongoing
1.2 Provide technical assistance and access to group health insurance plans for employers to better support staff, especially in the agriculture, non-profit and service sectors.	Pacific Source, Chambers, state and local industry associations	Mid
1.3 Address seasonality and part-time employment opportunities and explore creative options to meld them into full-time opportunities.	Workforce boards, seasonal employers, CGTA, Mt. Hood Gorge RDMO, industry associations	Mid
1.4 Host events to support businesses with their workforce, including workshops for small businesses on current employment law and/or how to expand your employee base, training workshops.	CGCC, WorkSource, SBDC, non-profit partners, Chambers.	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 2: Enhance training opportunities to connect residents with local job opportunities.

2.1 Focus on training specifically to address the talent needs of target industries identified in the CEDS.	Workforce boards, CGCC, WorkSource, SBDC	Short, Ongoing
2.1.2 Identify common skill sets needed across industries, including emerging skills.	Industry alliances, regional/state employment and workforce agencies	Short, Ongoing
2.1.2 Increase skillset of workforce to meet industry needs.	Ports, Business Oregon, industry alliances, regional/state employment and workforce agencies	Mid, Ongoing
2.2 Increase secondary and postsecondary collaboration for curriculum and technical training programs that targets local employers' needs.	School districts, workforce boards, CGCC, WorkSource, ESDs	Short, Ongoing
2.3 Leverage and expand Gorge Works via CGCC to employ more young people in internship and apprenticeship career pathway opportunities.	Workforce boards, CGCC	Mid
2.4 Promote use of region-wide interest/skills matchup service to increase access and interest.	WorkSource, Chambers, workforce boards	Short, Ongoing
2.5 Expand dual credit opportunities between all local high schools and community college.	Colleges, school districts	Short, Ongoing
2.6 Increase opportunities for career exploration in K-12 to help students identify their interest areas.	School districts, workforce boards, STEM orgs, industry associations, chambers	Short, Ongoing

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
2.6.1 Increase speakers from various industries to school classrooms to introduce required skills and potential jobs available in an industry. Expose students early and often.	School districts, workforce boards, STEM orgs, industry associations, chambers, SBDC	Short, Ongoing
2.6.2 Utilize school libraries. Organize events with community groups and industries for high school students.	School districts, workforce boards, STEM orgs, industry associations, chambers	Mid
2.6.3 Strengthen industry engagement with high school career counseling.	School districts, workforce boards, STEM orgs, industry associations, chambers	Short, Ongoing
2.7 Utilize community libraries for more activities to connect residents to training, employers and career information.	Public libraries, workforce boards, industry associations, WorkSource	Mid
2.8 Create an informal coordinating team representing Clark College, Yakima Valley CC, Mount Hood CC, Columbia Gorge CC, Oregon and Washington State extension services to identify opportunities for shared faculty, facilities, and instructional program support.	CGCC, partner listed	Mid

Strategy 3: Provide career training and services that specifically address bilingual and indigenous workforce needs.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
3.1 Participate in community groups whose target audience is underserved and cultural minorities, offering specific job training or employment opportunity activities (e.g. job fairs).	Next Door, CGCC, Workforce boards, OHDC, OED-MSFW, school districts, WorkSource	Short, Ongoing
3.2 Leverage Oregon Human Development Corporation's work with Migrant/Seasonal Farm Workers to cultivate promotional opportunities for low-wage laborers. CGCC's ag tech program and on-the-job-training could be used as vehicles.	CGCC, OHDC, Workforce boards, WorkSource	Short, Ongoing
3.3 Increase foreign language skills in our employers to enhance the multi-cultural resources.	CGCC - ESoL, OHDC, The Next Door	Mid
3.4 Establish job/ life skills coaches to regularly visit Native American in-lieu sites to work with youth.	CRITFC, Nch'i Wana, NAYA, CGESD, Youth Think, Culture Seed, 4-H extension, CGCC	Mid

Strategy 4: Address childcare needs of employers and workers.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
4.1 Support trainings and apprenticeship models for the childcare workforce.	CGCC, workforce boards, CCR&R and Early Learning Hub, Head Start, OCDC	Short, Ongoing

Robust Workforce Action Plan

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
4.2 Promote small business support opportunities targeted to new childcare businesses.	SBDC, Klickitat County Childcare Committee, CCR&R, CGCC, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
4.3 Support development of employer-supported childcare options.	Private industry, foundations, CCR&R and Early Learning Hub	Long
4.4 Support Columbia Gorge Community College in developing a public childcare center.	CGCC, partners	Mid

Strategy 5: Support strong pre-K to 12 programs throughout the region.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
5.1 Advocate for consistent and increased funding for educational programs throughout the region. a) Advocate for state funding. b) Support mechanisms for local funding (eg Gorge Community Foundation, scholarships). c) Advocate for wage increases.	Education partners, Gorge Comm Fdtn, local advocacy groups	Short, Ongoing
5.2 Identify and address facilities issues for K-12 system. a) Support master planning efforts for school districts. b) Support new facility needs identified in master plans: bonding, funding campaigns, site identification. c) Identify re-use options for closed facilities, including makerspace/ trade/skill centers.	School Districts, ESDs, business partners, ED partners	Mid to Long
5.3 Identify strong performing schools as an asset for recruitment and retention of business. Encourage media coverage of academic achievements. Compile data for employers of achievement metrics.	School districts, ED partners, industry alliances	Short to Mid

Strategy 6: Improve incumbent worker skills; support retooling and upgrading skills.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
6.1 Increase awareness of training options available. Further establish relationships with local workforce boards.	Workforce boards, CGCC, WorkSource, SBDC	Short to Mid
6.2 Address direct skill needs; focusing on skills transferable to a constantly evolving economy. a) Focus on filling "baby boomer" gap and addressing aging workforce issues. b) Address basic math and literacy skills. c) Develop contextual skills.	Workforce boards, CGCC, School Districts	Long

Resilient Infrastructure

Ensure communities and businesses of the Gorge have reliable, resilient access to infrastructure, including attainable housing, high-capacity broadband, sustainable sources of energy, and emergency services, among others, to support future population demands and economic opportunities.

OVERVIEW

Infrastructure, including attainable housing, high-capacity broadband, sustainable sources of energy, and emergency services, among others, is critical to meeting our current needs and supporting future growth driven by our expanding regional economy. Some of these systems have reached or exceeded capacity, while others are facing compliance issues that challenge their operations. Some systems have seen significant investment by local communities to plan for the future. Each of these key infrastructure areas will require innovative approaches to dealing with capacity and resource constraints to build on assets. Below are strategies focusing on each of the key infrastructure areas that incorporate the following principles:

Seek to better understand existing conditions:
Understanding key infrastructure needs, gaps in availability, examples of strategies that have made systems stronger, and barriers to moving projects forward is critical to providing the infrastructure foundation needed to support the region moving forward.

Plan for and facilitate investment in key infrastructure projects: The successful development of key infrastructure projects supports the regional economy, increases community resilience, and provides opportunities to prepare for the future.

Support project readiness: To meet infrastructure needs in the region, communities will need to match their own resources with outside investment through state and federal programs as well as private funding resources. To achieve this, communities must have the capacity to move from feasibility through planning to increase access to these resources.

There are five Action Plans within Resilient Infrastructure:

≋ **Water/Wastewater**

⌂ **Housing**

((•)) **Broadband**

⚡ **Energy**

⇄ **Transportation**

Water/Wastewater

While some jurisdictions have made significant investments to ensure sufficient infrastructure to meet both current demand and future needs, many water and wastewater treatment facilities in the region are aging.

Some have reached or are exceeding capacity and overuse of this infrastructure will ultimately limit productivity and livability. Some systems are dealing with compliance issues that can be challenging to address as these systems represent some of the most costly systems for local governments. Our expanding economy will continue to place strains on this critical infrastructure and drive demands for well-functioning water and wastewater systems that need to be met.

As weather patterns change, we are also increasingly faced with water access, storage, and groundwater concerns even though our region has been highly innovative in our approach to dealing with these constraints. Many of our Soil and Water Conservation Districts and Irrigation Districts, as well as Farmer's Conservation Alliance and Wy'East Resource Conservation and Development are leaders in innovations to address these challenges proactively.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
Strategy 1: Plan for and facilitate investment in water and wastewater projects that enhance the Gorge community, economy, resiliency, and address growing demand.		
1.1 Inventory water and wastewater system needs regionally.	Counties, Cities, Water/Sanitary Districts MCEDD, PUDs, Ecology, DEQ, OHA, WA Dept of Health	Short
1.1.1 Assess current capacity and identify systems with room for growth or barriers to accessing needed investment. Leverage existing system master plans to understand needs.		
1.1.2 Support opportunities for coordinated approaches to addressing water access and wastewater treatment challenges such as biosolids disposal.		
1.2 Prioritize and upgrade key water systems to address economic development constraints, focusing on:	Counties, Cities, water/sanitary districts, Ports, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
1.2.1 Systems serving industrial parks and areas with significant housing development capacity.		
1.2.2 Redundancy for systems accessing water through sensitive ecological areas or with water resource constraints.		
1.2.3 Investments into facilities to keep pace and support growth in key industry sectors, such as food processing.		

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
1.3 Address aging septic systems.	States (Ecology, DEQ), local partners	Long
1.4 Provide technical assistance and grant administration to support key water/ wastewater projects and to assist small communities, including Native American in-lieu sites.	MCEDD	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 2: Support innovative products and practices in the region to foster continued access to water resources as snow melt and precipitation reduces.

2.1 Support innovation of technologies in irrigation and improving tools to support management of water resources.	Wy'East, FCA, soil/ water conservation districts, watershed councils, industry	Mid to Long
2.2 Engage with and support Irrigation Districts and Watershed Council projects to support addressing water resource concerns, such as declining aquifers.	Watershed Councils, Irrigation Districts, county economic development	Short, Ongoing
2.3 Increase residential conservation practices through information dissemination and other resources.	Cities, Water Districts	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 3: Increase access to state and federal resources to support infrastructure development.

3.1 Increase local capacity to develop and manage infrastructure projects through access to training opportunities and technical assistance.	MCEDD, funders, RCAC	Short, Ongoing
3.2 Advocate for funding to support moving projects to "shovel ready" so that they are more competitive for implementation funding.	Local advocacy entities	Short
3.3 Increase awareness of resources available by sharing information on funding and technical assistance programs as they become available or change.	MCEDD, County economic development	Short, Ongoing
3.4 Actively pursue new opportunities available via ARPA, IIJA and other federal infrastructure support.	Cities, Counties, water/sanitary districts, Ports, MCEDD	Short

Housing

Access to housing has been identified as one of the region's primary economic development barriers. This challenge has several components.

Availability and affordability: Communities need adequate housing for residents of all ages and all income levels, but those who work in our communities are increasingly unable to live in them. Second homes and short-term vacation rentals contribute to the economy, but also create market pressures that deplete attainable housing. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that the cost for housing has increased more rapidly than wages.

Housing stock: Overall, the housing stock in the Mid-Columbia region is older than either that of the US or Oregon and Washington. While there have been new units created over the last five years, it has not kept up with population growth. This shortage of quality housing is exacerbated by dwindling supplies of available land that limit what is available for housing developments and recent supply chain volatility and increasing costs for construction materials. These factors make developing affordable and attainable housing more challenging.

Impact to business: Public and private employers large and small express concern about their ability to attract and retain a local workforce due to the cost and availability of housing within reasonable commuting distances. This significantly limits their ability to thrive or expand and presents critical challenges for continued economic prosperity in the region.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 1: Increase awareness and understanding of housing market conditions in the Gorge.

1.1 Utilize regional housing market analysis conducted by Oregon and Washington.	MCHA, MCAR, Home builders, OHCS, WHC, MCEDD, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short
1.2 Support buildable land inventory analysis for communities without current information.	MCHA, Cities, Counties, CRGC, DLCD, MCEDD, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Mid
1.3 Support code updates that would allow additional opportunities for attainable and affordable housing production.	MCHA, Cities, Counties, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short, Ongoing
1.4 Engage in studies and strategies to address tribal housing needs.	MCHA, Yakama Nation Housing Authority, Nch'i Wana, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short, Ongoing

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 2: Develop innovative strategies to support increasing attainable housing production in the Gorge.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
2.1 Support regional funding and incentives for housing.	Local governments, OHCS, WDSHS	Mid
2.2 Assist local jurisdiction's efforts to incentivize affordable and attainable housing, including consideration of local revenue generation opportunities for purposes of affordable housing.	Local governments, Regional Solutions, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
2.3 Advocate for key federal and state funding programs.	Local advocacy partners	Short, Ongoing
2.3.1 Support continued and increased investments in USDA Rural Development and Housing and Urban Development programs that promote housing affordability for renters and homeowners.		
2.3.2 Support adequate investments of capital resources in WA and OR housing programs.		
2.4 Support development of employer-assisted housing programs. Increase access to capital for these programs.	Industry associations, Chambers. Local advocacy partners.	Short to Long
2.5 Host forums on innovative practices and specific investment platforms.	MCHA, MCEDD, Regional Solutions	Short
2.6 Incorporate transit connections into housing development planning to support increased connectivity as well as leverage resource opportunities.	Cities, regional transit providers, MCEDD, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short, Ongoing
2.7 Increase access to, and utilization of, energy efficiency and home repair programs to improve existing housing stock, including Native American in-lieu sites.	MCACC, WAGAP, MCHA, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 3: Enhance communication and coordination across the region to support housing development.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
3.1 Engage in an education and information campaign to highlight the housing crisis. Develop common materials. Highlighting the tie to local economy.	Regional Solutions, MCEDD, MCHA, WGAP, MCAC, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short
3.2 Develop stronger connections with contractors, developers and employers for multi-housing units to increase understanding of barriers to increasing housing supply.	Regional Solutions, MCEDD, Industry Alliances, local government, Columbia Cascade Housing Corporation	Short
3.3 Increase workforce development opportunities to support the necessary labor.	CGCC, Clark College, Workforce boards	Mid

Broadband

Broadband is essential to providing economic opportunities throughout the Mid-Columbia region. The region's rural nature and challenging and diverse terrain make building broadband infrastructure extremely costly and nearly impossible for private sector investment alone to meet needs.

Enhancing broadband capacity for the region will enhance economic opportunities and support more resilient and networked communities. In addition:

- Improving broadband connection in the region means several things. *Building redundancy* that connects east/west and north/south enables more reliable broadband connections throughout the region in the event of an outage, cable-cut, or natural disaster. This redundancy is a necessary condition for businesses interested in locating or growing in the region. *Increasing speeds and decreasing latency* in connections means that they can better support industry growth in technology and other sectors, improve telemedicine and distance learning capabilities, and provide more robust use of many other applications for businesses and communities.

- Reaching *key tower sites and facilities* increases service for public safety communications as well as opportunities for private internet and cellular carriers to build upon the backbone investment for additional connectivity;

- *Addressing un/under-served areas* will increase internet access at homes, businesses, and key community anchor institutions.

- Increasing broadband throughout the region means additional *homes* become viable choices for residents that require internet access for their work or businesses at their residences, relieving some housing pressures with adequate broadband access currently. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, this has become a high priority for many in our workforce as well as for students.

- Enhanced broadband provides *connection to education and training* opportunities for the growth of a skilled and talented workforce.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
Strategy 1: Support addressing middle and last mile telecommunications infrastructure gaps.	ISPs, WSBO, OSBO, Communities, IT services providers	
1.1 Collaborate with private industry, utility owners, and other partners to support expanding infrastructure.	Communities, ISPs, Gorge Broadband Consortium	Short, Ongoing
1.2 Further develop relationships with and engage internet service providers to discuss gaps in services throughout the region. Assist in identification of demand in under and unserved communities, including Native American in-lieu sites.	ISPs, CRITFIC, Nch'i Wana, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
1.3 Leverage larger institutional connections to support increasing residential services in their areas.	Anchor institutions, ISPs, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
1.4 Invest in technologies that are scalable and affordable to residents.	ISPs, Communities	Short, Ongoing
1.5 Work with ISPs to support improving available speeds and reduce latency in the network to support business development in the tech sector and other industries where applicable.	ISPs, Industry Associations	Short, Ongoing
1.6 Work with permitting and local partners to reduce barriers to broadband through increased awareness of "dig once" opportunities and streamlining permitting.	Cities, Counties, Gorge Broadband Consortium	Short
1.7 Proactive planning with infrastructure projects to support increased broadband deployment.	Cities, Counties, WSDOT, ODOT	Short

Strategy 2: Support investments into a fully redundant network.

2.1 Ensure redundancy and resiliency in broadband infrastructure is incorporated into regional planning.	Gorge Broadband Consortium	Mid
2.2 Support communications infrastructure that allows for interconnection between emergency services.	Public Safety Networks	Short, Ongoing
2.3 Address wireless dead zones, in partnership with internet and cellular providers.	ISPs, Cell Providers Public Safety Partners, Counties	Long

Strategy 3: Advocate for and pursue funding through federal and state funding programs.

3.1 Build regional capacity to track program opportunities and legislation. Connect them with local projects.	Gorge Broadband Consortium	Mid
3.2 Engage with State and Federal partners about impacts of funding programs in rural areas as well as barriers to access.	Cities, Counties, ISPs, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
3.3 Encourage sustained program funding for capacity building to augment competitive federal grants.	Local advocacy partners	Short, Ongoing
3.4 Support continued and increased funding into currently over-subscribed broadband funding resources, including USDA, NTIA, and state programs.	Local advocacy partners	Short, Ongoing
3.5 Support development of state incentive programs to match federal and private resources.	Local advocacy partners	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 4: Increase adoption and use of existing broadband infrastructure.

4.1 Offer business technology trainings and forums.	SBDC, Libraries, County Ec Dev	Mid
4.2 Offer trainings and forums focused on community technology literacy.	Libraries, School Districts, Workforce boards, CGCC, Clark College	Mid

Energy

Reliable, affordable energy is critical for economic development in the Mid-Columbia region.
A convergence of challenges and opportunities make planning and strategic investment in this area critical for long-term economic advancement in the region.

- Events like fires, winter storms, and high heat can cause power outages, which are increasing with more frequent severe weather. These events cripple community lifelines and cost industry millions by slowing operations and damaging materials and products.

- Energy costs affect workforce housing affordability, transportation options, and businesses' bottom line. The region's historically low-cost power attracts data firms and other high energy users, but increased demand could create supply challenges that threaten affordability and access. Challenges are exacerbated by trends towards electrification in many industries and aging infrastructure.

- Like many rural communities, the region lacks contractors to support the myriad of jobs needed to build and maintain energy infrastructure at all levels.

Meanwhile, international, federal, and state developments in energy technology and policy, regional strengths in this area, and close ties with industry partners create unique opportunities to address energy challenges through local innovation at diverse scales and in our key industries.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 1: Leverage state requirements for 100% renewable energy generation to support investment in our region and increase resiliency of our local energy system.

1.1 Increase opportunities for energy resources/investments to stay local.	Utilities, Cities, Counties, Irrigation Districts	Mid
1.2 Support efforts to modernize and harden the electric grid, including those that would allow for electric vehicles and reduced power disturbances.	Utilities, ETO, BPA, PNNL, States, Cities	Short
1.3 Explore opportunities to incorporate distributed renewable energy production to increase resilience for facilities and industry.	Cities, Counties, project owners	Mid
1.4 Identify and pursue opportunities to support utility scale renewable projects in the region.	CGBREZ, Counties, Industry associations, project owners	Mid

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 2: Support investments that keep critical facilities and communities powered during disruptive events.

2.1 Design and secure funding for resilient backup power systems, like distributed renewable energy and storage, that allow critical facilities and vulnerable industries to continue operating during power outages	Cities, Counties, project owners, Ports, utilities, HRC Energy Council, Energy Trust	Mid
2.2 Investigate opportunities for micro-hydro and solar + storage to support emergency resilience.	Cities, Counties, water/sanitary districts, irrigation districts, HRC Energy Council, Energy Trust	Mid
2.3 Support mapping and coordination efforts to identify high priority areas to co – locate local generation and backup power with areas of highest need for generation and backup power.	Critical facilities, emergency managers, utilities, Energy Trust , hazard mitigation officers, governing bodies	Short

Strategy 3: Encourage investment in energy conservation for homes and businesses to reduce costs, reduce grid constraints, and increase regional competitiveness.

3.1 Collect and share educational resources related to energy conservation opportunities and incentives.	MCHA, MCAC, WAGAP; utilities, ETO, HRC Energy Council	Short
3.2 Identify opportunities to increase access to energy savings, particularly among vulnerable populations and industries, and those with the least access.	MCHA, MCAC, WAGAP; utilities, Energy Trust, HRC Energy Council	Short
3.3 Host trainings to support builders in building to and above state energy standards.	Builders associations, energy education groups	Mid
3.4 Develop certifications and adult education classes to develop and support energy workforce contractors. Align with general workforce development strategies.	CGCC, Energy Trust, Workforce boards,	Mid
3.5 Develop and support pre-apprenticeship programs and energy specific STEM programs at the K-12 level. Align with general workforce development strategies.	CGCC, School Districts, Energy Trust	Mid
3.6 Ensure clear information is available to support local businesses becoming approved installers to work with incentive programs.	Energy Trust, utilities	Mid

Strategy 4: Support the needs of the Native American community to connect the in–lieu sites to electricity and/or supplies of propane for heat.	Utilities, MCAC, WAGAP, CRITFIC, Nch'i Wana	Short, Ongoing

Transportation

Provide a safe, efficient, equitable and accessible regional transportation system to enhance the livability, resilience, and economic vitality of the Mid-Columbia region.

Location advantages support trade within and outside the region, offering options for expanded export opportunities. The region has a distinct geographic advantage in being centrally located in the Pacific Northwest and is uniquely positioned to do business with approximately a 6,000 mile area from the West Coast to the East Coast to Asia, all within one regular business day. The region is a significant transportation corridor and offers market access through:

- Interstates and highways both East/West and North/South with connecting bridges.

- Airports, with close proximity to Portland International Airport and the presence of regional and local airports.

- Rail service for the movement of goods on both sides of the river with Burlington Northern and Union Pacific. Currently, passenger rail service is only available on the Washington side of the river.

- Columbia River travel, which is particularly important for transporting waste and ag products on barges and tourists on cruise ships.

- A growing regional transit network as well as bicycle and pedestrian connections.

While market access and the mix of transportation modes available for the movement of goods and people are a distinct asset to the region, maintaining that infrastructure, and expanding it to meet growing industry and population needs, is a challenge. Issues include county/ city road maintenance and funding, limitations to interstates and highways, the need for expanded local airport facilities, rail safety, aging bridges, aging dams, transit funding, and challenges maintaining access to federal lands. In addition to infrastructure, our transportation network increasingly serves the needs of a mobile workforce. Data describing commuting habits in the Mid-Columbia by place of work show that workers in the Mid-Columbia region travel outside their state of residence to work to a greater extent than the average worker in Oregon, Washington, or the nation. Public transportation is necessary both from a human and social services standpoint but also from an economic standpoint.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
Strategy 1: Coordinate transportation priorities and investments and align planning efforts among regional partners to support the Mid-Columbia's economies and communities.		
1.1 Advocate for federal, state and private investments into transportation priorities.	Local advocacy partners	Short, Ongoing
1.1.1 Identify opportunities to advance regional transportation priorities in a potential Washington Transportation Package.	Local govts- counties, cities, ports, transportation providers	Short, Ongoing

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
1.1.2 Pursue Federal Lands Access Program funding options.	TransLink and providers, Hist Hwy, DOTs	Short, Ongoing
1.1.3 Identify and pursue opportunities through ARPA, IIJA, and other federal infrastructure and transportation programs	Local govts, Hist Hwy, Ports, DOTs, MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
1.2 Maintain, preserve and enhance existing infrastructure, while investing in modernization to improve the transport of goods and movement of people.		
1.2.1 Improve connections between rail, air, highway, and river systems.	Regional airport, port, DOTs, FHWA	Long
1.2.2 Commit resources to address facility modernization critical to the overall transportation system.	DOTs, counties, cities, Ports	Mid to Long
1.2.3 Address needs of the electrical grid to support vehicle electrification.	(See Energy 1.2)	
1.3 Identify, seek funding and complete priority highway, road and bridge transportation infrastructure projects.		
1.3.1 Participate in the Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Commission (RTC), Region 1 Area Commission on Transportation (ACT) and Lower John Day ACT to identify priority projects and increase local distribution of funds. Integrate annually to this strategy with regional project prioritization.	Local govts, ACT, SW WA RTC, TransLink and providers, MCEDD, DOTs	Short, Ongoing
1.3.2 Focus on key corridors and market roads necessary for the transport of goods. Address bottlenecks on the road system and bi-state connections. Consider regional funding models for local projects that have larger impacts.	Local govts, ACT, SW WA RTC, TransLink and providers, MCEDD, DOTs	Mid
1.3.3 Focus on maintenance and replacement of all Columbia River crossings to address resiliency, safety and business needs, while increasing bike and pedestrian connections.	Local govts, ACT, SW WA RTC, MCEDD, DOTs	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 2: Support enhancements to regional air, water and rail infrastructure for cargo and passenger transport (locals and visitors).

2.1 Further develop the Columbia Gorge Regional Airport, serving key healthcare and tech businesses.	Col Gorge Regional Airport, Klickitat County, City TD, industry	Mid
2.2 Identify opportunities to further Goldendale airport's potential as a distribution center.	City Goldendale, Klickitat County EDA	Mid
2.3 Support enhancements to the Hood River Jernstedt airport.	Port of Hood River	Mid
2.4 Enhance the Columbia River transportation system with docks for commerce and cruise ships.	Ports, MCEDD	Mid
2.5 Advocate for facilities at Amtrak passenger rail stops for cargo and passenger rail.	Local governments- WA counties, cities, MCEDD	Long

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline

Strategy 3: Improve safety for all users of regional and local transportation networks.

3.1 Pursue funding to conduct and implement a Parking Management Plan to address parking in communities and at recreation sites to distribute congestion.	WSDOT, ODOT, USFS, OPRD, WPRD, counties, cities, MCEDD, TransLink and providers	Short
3.2 Address parking issues, especially at recreation access points (e.g. trailheads) that impact safety.	WSDOT, ODOT, USFS, OPRD, WPRD	Short, Ongoing
3.3 Find funding to provide training for transit operators on anti-bias and responding to violence.	MCEDD, transit providers	Short, Ongoing

Strategy 4: Increase capacity of regional transportation network with efficient and accessible bi-state transit options.

4.1 Address priorities expressed in transit plans, including Human Services Coordinated Transportation Plans, Wasco County Transit Development Plan, Hood River County Transit Master Plan, Transportation Innovations outcomes, Community Health Improvement Plan.	TransLink and providers, RTC	Short to Long
4.2 Support implementation of Gorge Regional Transit Strategy Phase 2.	TransLink and providers, RTC, DOTs	Mid
4.3 Support existing and develop new options for fixed route transit.	Local governments, providers	Short, Ongoing
4.4 Further bolster the Gorge TransLink Alliance to support a seamless bi-state transit system.	TransLink Alliance and providers	Short, Ongoing
4.5 Support transportation options programs through the Get There Oregon platform.	MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
4.6 Facilitate employment transportation needs; coordinating vanpools and pursuing public transit to help facilitate retaining/ recruiting workforce needed to support business growth, gain access to labor market in Portland, and connect affordable housing with jobs.	MCEDD, Translink, providers, Industry	Short, Ongoing
4.7 Build awareness of available services.	TransLink, MCEDD, providers	Short, Ongoing
4.8 Support transit fleet electrification to reduce emissions.	TransLink, MCEDD, providers	Mid

Strategy 5: Increase equitable access to transit options among underserved populations, including to Native American in-lieu sites. | TransLink, MCEDD, providers, Nch'l Wana, CRITFC | Short, Ongoing

5.1 Support opportunities to integrate transit and transportation options into development projects, especially affordable and multi-family housing.	(See Housing 2.6)	Short, Ongoing

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
Strategy 6: Provide safe and complete facilities for bicyclists and pedestrians.		
6.1 Support completion of the Historic Columbia River Highway trail.	Hist Hwy, local advocacy partners	Short to Long
6.2 Further facilitate Gorge Hubs facilities.	Gorge Hubs communities, Hist Hwy, MCEDD, ODOT	Short
6.3 Assess opportunities and develop strategies for all bridges to enable bike/pedestrian access	Ports, DOTs	Long
6.4 Implement Safe Route to Schools projects in The Dalles and Hood River.	Cities of The Dalles and Hood River, school districts, ODOT, MCEDD	Short to Mid
Strategy 7: Invest in resiliency for the region to mitigate, adapt and plan for extreme weather, natural and human-caused disasters.		
7.1 Enhance regional airports to support firefighting.	Port of Hood River, City of The Dalles, City of Cascade Locks, Klickitat County	Mid
7.2 Develop plans for alternative routes across the Columbia River during emergencies.	ODOT, WSDOT, MCEDD, Ports	Short
7.3 Analyze county natural hazard mitigation plans for cross-community transportation coordination opportunities. Convene partners to develop regional solutions for transportation resiliency.	Counties, cities, ODOT, WSDOT	Mid

Powerful Regional Collaboration

Effectively collaborate and advocate as a bi-state region to leverage the economic assets of the Columbia River Gorge to reach our goals for strong businesses, a robust workforce, and resilient infrastructure.

OVERVIEW

A culture of collaboration and strong existing networks were identified as regional strengths in the SWOT analysis. This goal presents opportunities to build on those strengths to help the region meet the three prior goals noted in the CEDS: *strong businesses, a robust workforce, and resilient infrastructure*. Working together as partners to advocate for the region will increase our success, allow us to reach higher, and bring additional resources into our communities to support addressing key challenges and leveraging opportunities

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
Strategy 1: Strengthen information gathering and sharing to advocate for community projects and policy issues.		
1.1 Develop a regional listserve of decision makers to be notified about projects, issues, advocacy work. Determine process for filtering information so as not to overload.	MCEDD, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Ongoing
1.2 Develop an annual advocacy list from partners, similar to CEDS projects list but focused on policy issues.	MCEDD, One Gorge, Counties, East Cascades Works	Mid, Ongoing
1.2.1 Advance a process to provide clarity around urban area growth boundary adjustment determinations.	Counties, Gorge Commission	Long
1.3 Share policy ideas and project funding requests at a regional level for collaborative state and federal advocacy. Highlight and recognize interconnections between projects to make them stronger.	MCEDD, One Gorge, The Next Door, Counties	Mid to Long
1.4 Foster collaborative communications with and among state and federal legislators.	Governing bodies, MCEDD, One Gorge	Short, Ongoing
Strategy 2: Build on existing collaborative groups.		
2.1 Identify existing collaboration groups in the region. Explore areas of overlap and opportunities to build on existing collaboration to share information and opportunities.	MCEDD, The Next Door, industry associations, County Ec Dev	Short

Powerful Regional Collaboration Action Plan

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
2.2 Establish minimum goals of representative collaborators (number and participation level of counties, associations, affiliate groups, across demographics, region, and type etc.).	Collaborative partners	Short
2.3 Identify and develop cross-jurisdictional, issue-level regional work groups to advance regionally significant projects and focus on each of the goal areas in the CEDS for implementation.	MCEDD	Short, Ongoing
2.4 Evaluate bringing Gilliam and Wheeler Counties into MCEDD service region in recognition of common economic sectors and regional identity.	MCEDD, Gilliam and Wheeler Counties, OR and WA, EDA, GEODC	Mid
2.5 Develop relationships between economic development partners and underserved community groups to foster increased collaboration.	The Next Door, CRITFC, Tribal Councils, economic development partners	Short, Ongoing
2.5.1 Increase representation on advocacy groups of Native American and Latino/a/Hispanic communities and other diverse populations.	TNDI, CRITFC, Tribal Councils, migrant farm worker groups, economic development partners	Short, Ongoing
2.5.2 Increase collaboration with tribal advocacy representatives such as those CRITFC has at a federal level.	Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest Indians, economic development partners	Mid
2.5.3 Consider creating new or joining existing groups to advance actions in the CEDS around Native American and Latino/a/Hispanic communities.	MCEDD, The Next Door, CRITFIC, Tribal Councils, economic dev. partners	Short, Ongoing
2.6 Continue to convene Economic Resiliency Team meeting to strengthen connections and resiliency regionally.	MCEDD, Regional Solutions	Short, Ongoing
2.7 Improve capacity of smaller communities to get ready for funding.	MCEDD, Ports, Skamania EDC, Klickitat EDA	Short, Ongoing
2.8 Identify opportunities to increase collaboration between the two state governments.	County economic development, Business OR, WA Commerce, Regional Solutions, MCEDD	Mid

Strategy 3: Increase capacity for a regional advocacy role.

Action Strategies	Collaborators	Timeline
3.1 Build funding for a collaborative advocacy role that would track state and federal legislation and bring partners together when opportunities arise.	Ports, Cities, Counties, PWA, Tribal governments, MCEDD	Mid

EVALUATION METRICS

This section provides information about metrics tracked to gauge the success of the work in this Strategy. Metrics reflect on regional economic health through each of the four goal areas. Each of these will be measured over time and across different geographies and demographics (age, race, gender, etc.) where possible to understand changes.

Strong Businesses

✓ Number of networking events and number of attendees

✓ Increase per capita personal income (within the workforce)

✓ Provide a healthy distribution across wage ranges.

✓ Net increase in average annual wage.

✓ Job creation in each industry sector.

✓ Number of companies in each sector.

✓ Revenue and payroll growth for target industries.

✓ Number of entrepreneurs receiving small business counseling services.

✓ Volume of small business lending.

✓ Enhance job creation and retention: Change in seasonally adjusted employment.

✓ Decreased trade/services leakages.

Robust Workforce

✓ Available/accessible childcare for regional workforce.

✓ Increased pre-school enrollment.

✓ Number of internships: % matched, # paid.

✓ Increased graduation/GED achievement.

✓ Increased rate of enrollment in postsecondary education. Local student's completion rates.

✓ Increase in high school students earning college credit.

✓ Increased average employment duration.

✓ Number of trainings or programs provided to underrepresented communities.

✓ Job availability that matches the growing population throughout the Gorge.

✓ Increase rate of participation in the labor force.

✓ Reduction in the unemployment rate.

Resilient Infrastructure

✓ Grant investments in infrastructure projects (all types)

✓ Economic impacts of infrastructure investments (connect with private sector)

✓ System efficiency (water loss, electricity consumption, etc) from Consumer Confidence Reports

≈ **Water/Wastewater:** capacity limitations, level of excess capacity, # of systems with compliance issues, consumption rates.

⇄ **Transportation:** Traffic counts, transit ridership by purpose, reduced redundancy of service, number of fixed routes, local airport usage.

⚡ **Energy:** Megawatts of installed local power generation, amount of time energy services are down due to natural disaster and associated financial losses.

⌂ **Housing:** New construction by single unit, multiple unit, and accessory dwellings; vacancy rates; short term rentals in comparison to the housing stock; number of units on the market for sale; Housing Affordability Dashboard with both sales and rental data where possible; Local ordinances updated to increase opportunities to support attainable/affordable housing; utilization of housing needs analysis: extent of strategy implementation.

((•)) **Broadband:** Increase in number with access to high-speed internet, subscription rates/ use, business utilization, affordability rate.

Powerful Regional Collaboration

✓ Increased communication between organizations, businesses, counties, and states.

✓ Number of partners on regional listserve of decision-makers. Number of communications sent.

✓ Funding for a collaborative advocacy role

✓ Increased representation on advocacy groups of Native American and Latino/a/Hispanic communities and other diverse populations.

✓ Number of Economic Resiliency Team meetings.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STRATEGY LEADERSHIP

MCEDD Board of Directors

Les Perkins, Hood River County

Dave Sauter, Klickitat County

Joe Dabulskis, Sherman County

Bob Hamlin, Skamania County

Steve Kramer, Wasco County

Mark Zanmiller, Cities of Hood River County

Jan Brending, Cities of Klickitat County

Leana Kinley, Cities of Skamania County

Erik Glover, Cities of Sherman Cities County

Mike Foreaker, Cities of Wasco County

David Griffith, Oregon Ports

Pat Albaugh, Washington Ports

Jonathan Lewis, Washington Chambers of Commerce

Tonya Brumley, Oregon Chambers of Commerce

Eric Proffitt, Workforce

Ken Bailey, Agriculture

Dr. Marta Yera Cronin, Higher Education

Jason Hartmann, Technology

Scott Clements, Private Business

Buck Jones, Food and Beverage

Robert Kimmes, Healthcare

CEDS Steering Committee

Hannah Brause, Washington State Extension

Greg Davis, Business (High Tech) in Hood River County

Austin Evans, Business (Restaurant, Hospitality) in Sherman County

Richard Foster, Klickitat County Economic Development Department

Buck Jones, Columbia River Intertribal Fish Commission

Liliana Justo Bello, The Next Door Inc.

Maui Meyer, Business (Hospitality, Real Estate) in Hood River + Wasco Counties

Carrie Pipinich, Wasco County Economic Development Commission/ Sherman County Economic Development

Genevieve Scholl, Port of Hood River and One Gorge

Jonathan Lewis, Klickitat Valley Health

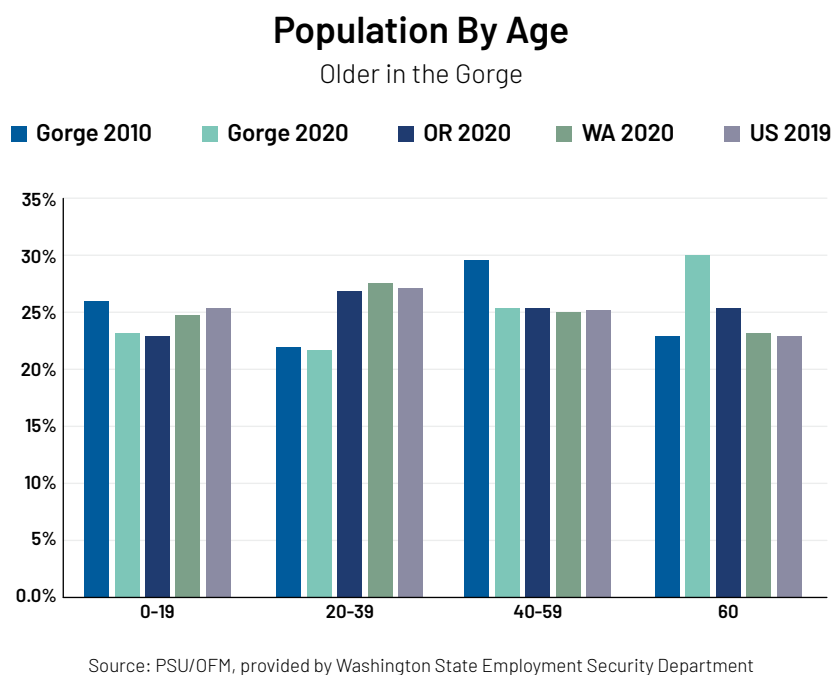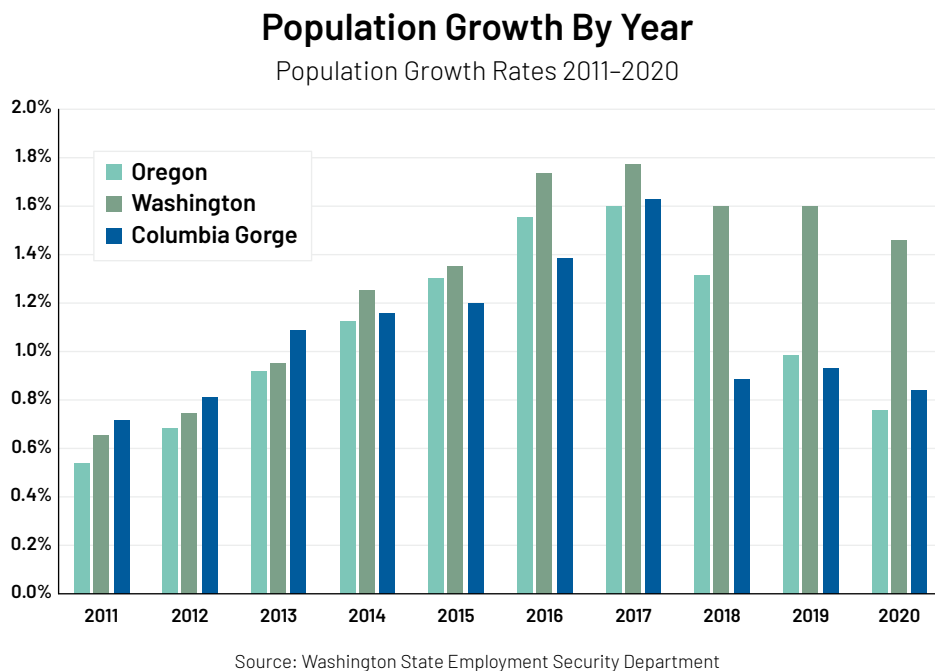Kevin Waters, Skamania Economic Development Council

APPENDIX B: PUBLIC SESSION REGISTRANTS

Alice Cannon, City of The Dalles

Alice Williamson, Oregon Agricultural Trust

Alma Gaeta, Gorge Grown Food Network

Amy McNamee, Bank of Eastern Oregon

Andrea Klaas, Port of The Dalles

Andrea Rogers, OR DHS -Vocational Rehabilitation

Angie Brewer, Wasco County Planning Department

Ann Harris, Oregon State University Extension

Annick Chalier, Hood River County Energy Council

Anthony Pena, Senator Patty Murray

Anthony Tarnasky, Columbia Bank

April Needham, WSU Center for Innovation

Arthur Babitz, Hood River County

Becky Brun, Pitchfork Communications

Bob Hamlin, Skamania

County

Brenda Stewart, East Cascades Works

Bryan Stebbins, U.S. Senator Patty Murray

Buck Jones, Columbia River Inter Tribal Fish Commission

Casey Gatz, USDA - Forest Service

Cate Rahmlow

Christy Christopher, Columbia Gorge STEM Hub

Claudia Munk-von Flotow, Real EstateCyndi Gentry, Northern Wasco County PUD

Dan Christopher, Klickitat County

Dan Spatz, Columbia Gorge Community College

Darcy Long-Curtiss, City of The Dalles

David Griffith, Port of The Dalles

David McClure, Klickitat Economic Development

Diana Adams, Goldendale Chamber

Dillon Borton, Key Bank

Emily Reed, Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance

Eric Strid, Hood River County Energy Council

Eva Kahn, Columbia Gorge Food Bank

Genevieve Scholl, Port of Hood River

Gil Kelley, Oregon Investment Board

Gordon Zimmerman, City of Cascade Locks

Gregory Price, Small Business Development Center

Hannah Ladwig, Gorge Grown Food Network

Heather Ficht, East Cascades Works

Holly Henderson, Maupin Outdoor Store

Jan Brending, City of White Salmon

Janet Hamada, The Next Door Inc.

Jeff Hecksel, Hood River County

Jennifer Toepke, Port of The Dalles

Jessie von Flotow, Orchard Lands LLC

Jill Burnette, Gorge Community Foundation

Jo Ferreira, Property Owner

Joanna Kaiserman, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Joel Madsen, Mid-Columbia Housing Authority

John Hardham, Light Wave Communications

Jonathan Lewis, Klickitat Valley Health

Jordan Haas, Gorge Grown Food Network

Josiah Dean, Balch Hotel

Justin Brock, Northern Wasco County PUD

Kari Greer, Pacific Power

Kate Franko, Google

Kate Willis, South Wasco Alliance

Katherine Raymond, Columbia Gorge Community College

Kelly Howsley Glover, Wasco County

Kristin Chatfield, WIC

Krystyna Wolniakowski, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Lauren Kolojejchick-Kotch

Leana Kinley, City of Stevenson

Les Perkins, Hood River County

Lisa Atkin, Gilliam County

Lisa Farquharson, The Dalles Chamber of Commerce

Lizzie Keenan, Columbia Gorge Tourism Alliance

Lydia Ivanovic, Columbia-Pacific EDD

Lynn Burditt

Margie Ziegler, Port of Klickitat

Marianna Roberts

Mark Johnson, Port of Cascade Locks

Martin Campos-Davis, OR Human Development Corporation

Matt King, Hood River Energy Council

Matthew Klebes, Wasco County

Betty Barnes, City of Bingen

Michael Held, Business Oregon

Michael McElwee, Port of Hood River

Mike Scroggs, CGCC & WorkSource

Naomi Fisher, Fort Vancouver Regional Libraries

Nate Stice, Office of Governor Kate Brown

Olga Kaganova, Port of Cascade Locks

Pat Beeman

Paul Lindberg, Healthy Gorge Initiative

Peter Cornelison, Friends of the Columbia Gorge

Phil Brady, Mid-Columbia Medical Center

Rachael Fuller, City of Hood River

Rich Mays, City of The Dalles

Richard Foster, Klickitat Economic Development.

Rodger Nichols, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Ross Hoag, Power4Flight

Sarah Goebel, People For People

Sarah Sullivan, Gorge Grown Food Network

Sasha Bentley, Local entrepreneur

Scott Bailey, WA Employment Security

Scott Edelman, OR Dept. Land Conservation and Development

Sharon Thornberry, Columbia Gorge Food Bank

Sondra Clark, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Stephen Lawrence, The Dalles Civic Auditorium

Suze Riley, Maupin Area Chamber of Commerce

Tamara Kaufman, Columbia River Gorge Commission

Tammara Tippel, Mt. Adams Chamber of Commerce

Tammy Miller, Cerulean Skies, LLC

Terra Lingley, ODOT

Terra McLeod, Fort Vancouver Regional Libraries

Tom Lannen, Skamania County

Traci Miller, Columbia Gorge Community College

Wes Cochran, U.S. Economic Development Administration

This list does not include MCEDD staff, online survey respondents, or focus group participants (Native American, Latino/a/Hispanic) who participated in this process.

APPENDIX C: ADDITIONAL REGIONAL ECONOMIC DATA

Population Growth

Population Growth By Year
Population Growth Rates 2011–2020

Source: Washington State Employment Security Department

Population By Age
Older in the Gorge

Source: PSU/OFM, provided by Washington State Employment Security Department

Population in the Gorge

Area	2010	2020	Change
Hood River	22,346	25,640	14.7%
Klickitat	20,318	22,770	12.1%
Sherman	1,765	1,795	1.7%
Skamania	11,066	12,220	10.4%
Wasco	25,213	27,295	8.3%
Gorge Total	80,708	89,720	11.2%
Oregon	3,831,074	4,268,055	11.4%
Washington	6,724,540	7,656,200	13.9%
U.S.	309,191,211	330,575,402	6.9%

Source: Census, PSU, OFM

Unincorporated Growth
Columbia Gorge Population, 2010–2020

| City or Town	July 1, 2010	July 1, 2020	Net Change	Percent Change	% of Total	
					2020	Growth
Hood River County	22,385	25,640	3,255	14.5%		
Unincorporated	14,060	15,655	1,595	11.3%	61%	49%
Sherman County	1,765	1,795	30	1.7%		
Unincorporated	615	575	-40	-6.5%	32%	
Wasco County	25,235	27,295	2,060	8.2%		
Unincorporated	10,065	10,815	750	7.5%	40%	36%
Klickitat County	20,318	22,770	2,452	12.1%		
Unincorporated	13,975	15,745	1,770	12.7%	69%	72%
Skamania County	11,066	12,220	1,154	10.4%		
Unincorporated	8,645	9,530	885	10.2%	78%	77%
Columbia Gorge	80,769	89,720	8,591	11.1%		
Unincorporated	47,360	52,320	4,960	10.5%	58%	55%
Incorporated	33,409	37,400	3,991	11.9%		

Source: Oregon Employment Department

Income Changes

Household income increased from 2015-2019 after seeing a dip due to the 2008-09 recession. Poverty has also decreased in most counties.
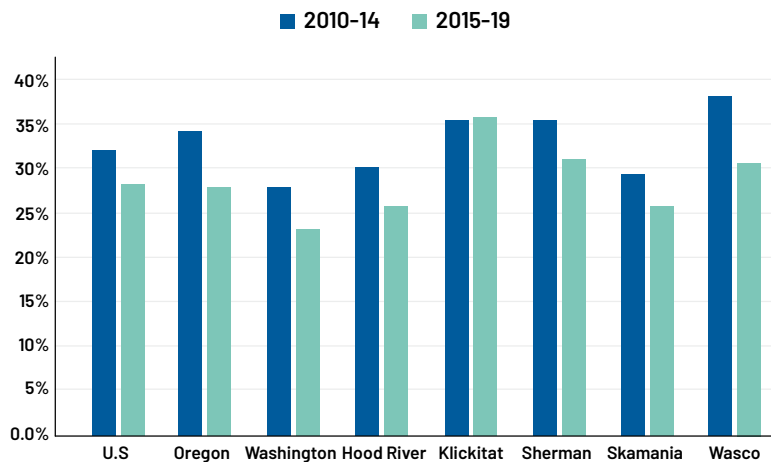
Median Household Income
Up across the board
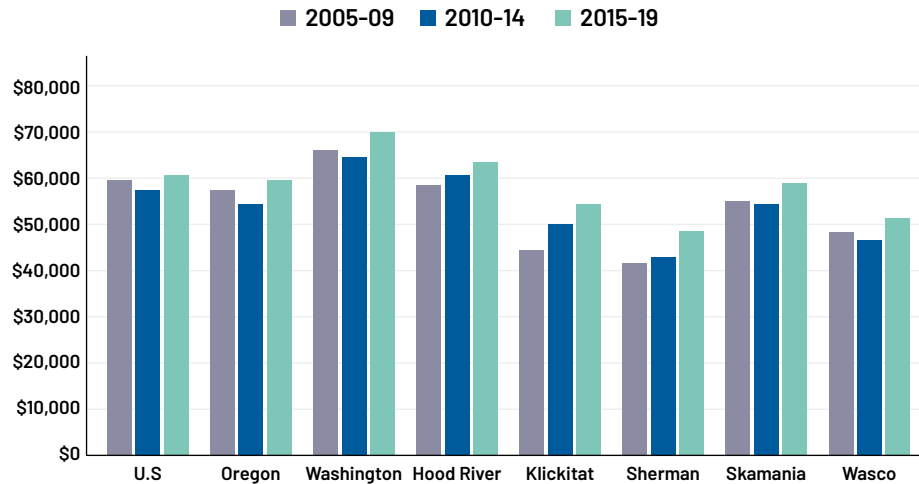
■ 2005-09 ■ 2010-14 ■ 2015-19

Source: Census Bureau/American Community Survey
provided by Washington State Employment Security Department

Low-Income Population (<185 percent of poverty)
Down in most counties

■ 2010-14 ■ 2015-19

Source: Census Bureau/American Community Survey
provided by Washington State Employment Security Department

Job Growth

The Gorge saw exponential job growth from 2014-2019. Prior to COVID-19, sectors with the largest growth included Educational and Health Services and Trade, Transportation, and Utilities.

Job Growth
More than triple

■ 2009-14　■ 2014-19
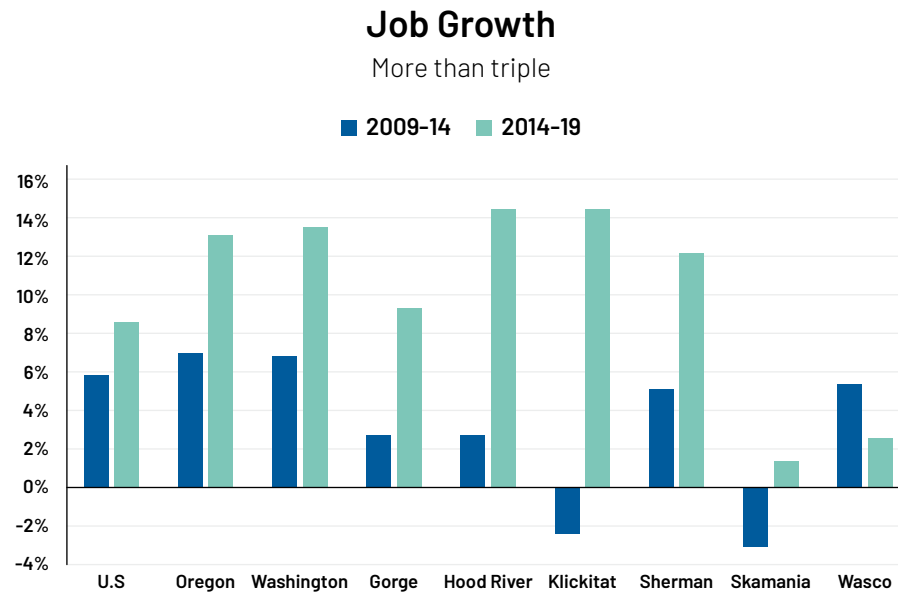
Source: BLS/OR and WA Employment Depts

Gorge Jobs Before COVID
### Job Change, Columbia Gorge, Feb 2015 - Feb 2020
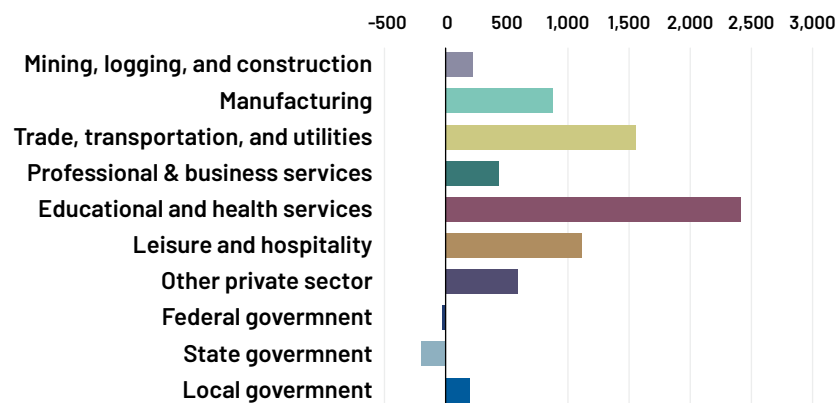
Source: Washington Employment Security Department/LMEA

Home Ownership, Rent Burden, and Educational Attainment

From 2015-2019, home ownership has grown slightly in Hood River and Skamania Counties, but has decreased in Wasco, Sherman, and Klickitat Counties. For most counties, the rent burden has decreased. Educational attainment continues to increase.

Home Ownership
■ 2010-14   ■ 2015-19
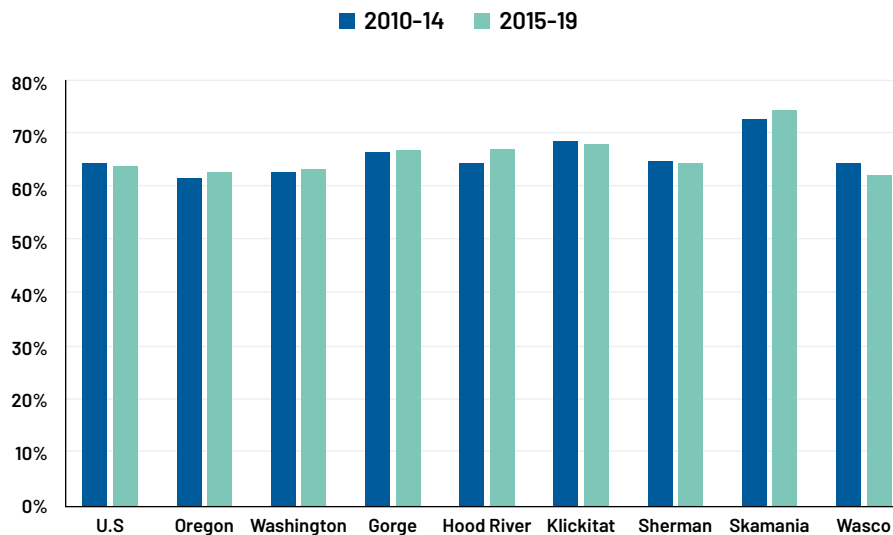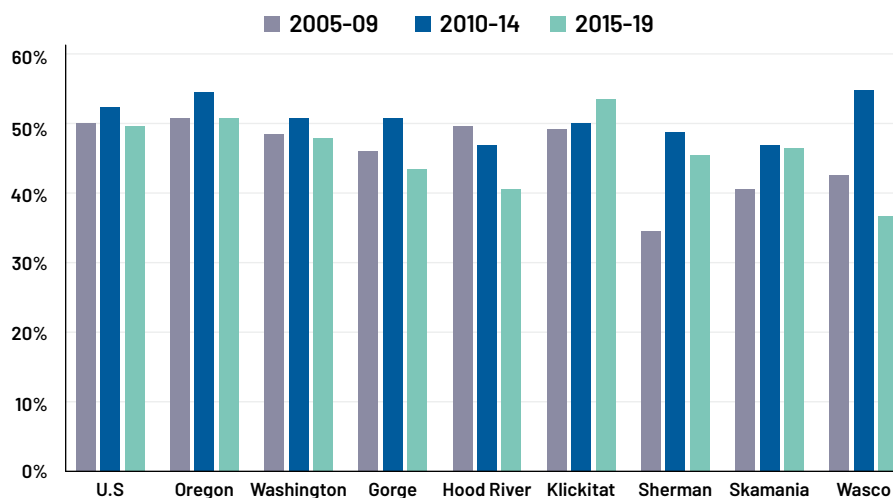

Source: Census Bureau/American Community Survey
WA Employment Security Dept

Cost-Burdened Renters
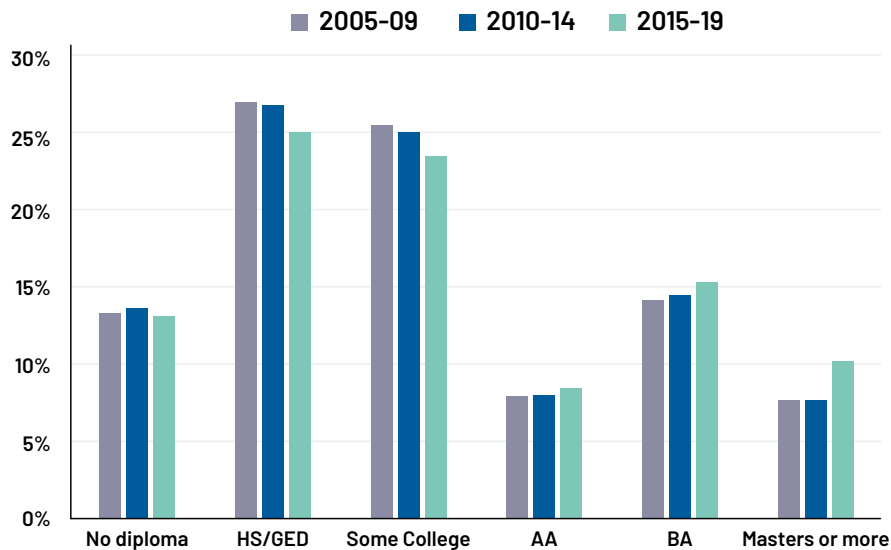*Generally, modest improvement*
■ 2005-09   ■ 2010-14   ■ 2015-19

Source: Census Bureau/American Community Survey
WA Employment Security Dept

Formal Educational Attainment

Generally increasing

■ 2005-09   ■ 2010-14   ■ 2015-19

(Bar chart showing percentages by educational category for three time periods. Approximate values:)

Category	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
No diploma	~13.5%	~13.8%	~13%
HS/GED	~27%	~27%	~25%
Some College	~25.5%	~25%	~23.5%
AA	~8%	~8%	~8.5%
BA	~14%	~14.5%	~15.5%
Masters or more	~7.5%	~7.5%	~10%

Additional Demographic Data

Race and Ethnicity	Columbia Gorge Counties	% of Total
Total	87,288	
Hispanic or Latino/a	15,962	18.3%
Not Hispanic or Latino/a	71,326	81.7%
Population of one race	66,758	76.5%
White alone	63,039	72.2%
Black or African American alone	298	0.3%
American Indian and Alaska Native alone	1,824	2.1%
Asian alone	891	1.0%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone	282	0.3%
Some Other Race alone	424	0.5%
Population of two or more races	4,568	5.2%

Mean travel time to work (minutes)

Hood River County, Oregon	18.8
Sherman County, Oregon	24.5
Wasco County, Oregon	18.2
Klickitat County, Washington	21.9
Skamania County, Washington	29.9

Housing Unit Building Permits (All Types) By County

	Jan- Dec 2020	Jan-Sept 2021
Hood River County	71	53
Sherman County	7	4
Wasco County	83	85
Klickitat County	91	148
Skamania County	82	58

Broadband Access and Speeds

Broadband Access	Households with Broadband of any type	Total households	% with BB
Oregon	1,385,086	1,611,982	85.9%
Washington	2,516,185	2,848,396	88.3%
Hood River County	7,087	8,600	82.4%
Sherman County	579	748	77.4%
Wasco County	8,095	10,305	78.6%
Klickitat County	7,115	8,877	80.2%
Skamania County	3,756	4,816	78.0%

Median Broadband Speeds by County (MBPS)

■ Median Upload   ■ Median Download

County	Median Upload	Median Download
Skamania	45.31	0.58
Klickitat	8.07	8.45
Hood River	10.95	3.48
Wasco	18.53	6.90
Sherman	16.92	6.02
US Avg. Oct 2021	131.16	19.18
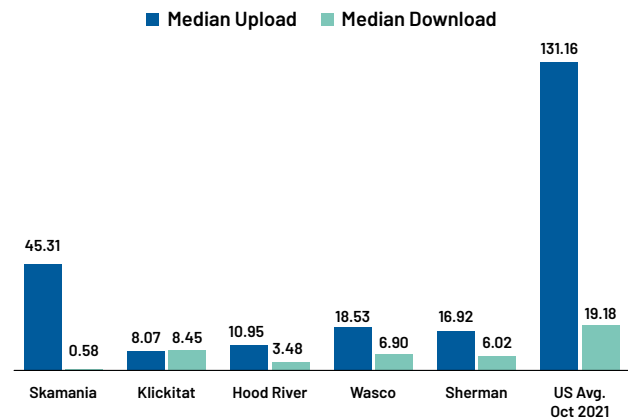
Employment

Columbia Gorge Covered Employment

Industry	2020 Jobs	
Total all ownerships	34,295	

Industry	2020 Jobs	Rank
Professional and business services	2,049	7
Leisure and hospitality	3,714	6
Manufacturing	3,974	5
Education and health services	4,655	4
Trade, transportation and utilities	5,253	3
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	5,435	2
Total all government	5,511	1

Columbia Gorge Covered Payroll

Industry	2020 Payroll	
Total all ownerships	$1,601,484,428	

Industry	2020 Payroll	Rank
Leisure and hospitality	$86,449,576	7
Professional and business services	$142,340,593	6
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	$170,920,226	5
Trade, transportation and utilities	$199,330,112	4
Education and health services	$220,984,855	3
Manufacturing	$242,587,542	2
Total all government	$314,693,504	1

Appendix D: Regional Project List

2023 Regional Priority Rank (Oregon)

Rank	Sponsor	Project	Reasoning
1	Ports of Cascade Locks, Hood River, and Klickitat, Klickitat County, Cities of Bingen and White Salmon	**Interstate Bridges** Port of Hood River Hood River-White Salmon Interstate Bridge Replacement: The existing bridge is nearly 100 years old, structurally obsolete and seismically deficient. A new bridge is needed to improve and ensure multi-modal transportation of people and goods across the Columbia River between the communities of Bingen and White Salmon in Washington, and Hood River in Oregon. Total project cost estimate: $520M. Approximately $450 million in State and Federal grants will be needed. Balance from local tolls. Port of Cascade Locks Bridge of the Gods Strengthening and Safety Improvements: Maintenance of the Bridge of the Gods and improvements to include 1) Seismic Strengthening of the Bridge ($12M) and 2) Additional Bridge resiliency and safety measures including a safe pathway for pedestrian and bicyclist needs ($70M).	Core transportation connection. Resilience issue. Impact to key industry sectors.
2	Hood River, Sherman, and Wasco Counties, City of Hood River	**Housing** Hood River: Development of the 780 Rand Road Housing Development project for affordable housing as well as additional land acquisition for affordable and attainable housing development in the City of Hood River and Hood River County. Total project cost estimate: $54M. Estimated amount of funds still needed is $51M (will apply for $17.6M in LIFT funds; $18M in LIHTC in 2023). Sherman: The housing stock in Sherman County is lacking the quantity and quality necessary for new employees to find a place to live in the County. Sherman County has created four incentive programs to encourage the construction of new housing or the rehabilitation of existing housing. The County continues to look for creative ideas that would solve the housing issues. Wasco: Housing prices have continued to be unaffordable for many in Wasco County and supply is not meeting current needs. This has hindered employees seeking to come to Wasco County have hindered businesses' ability to grow. Better understanding this need and supporting community partners in opportunities to address it will impact access to a robust workforce moving forward.	Addressing housing constraints is a priority strategy for the CEDS
3	Columbia Gorge Educations Service District	**Columbia Gorge Childcare Center** There continues to be a serious shortage of qualified childcare. Columbia Gorge Community College (CGCC) as the first step in developing a public childcare center and to improve workforce training available to childcare providers. CGCC is working with local partners for both potential locations and ongoing engagement. They are also increasing the size of the proposed center to 200 slots to reduce the subsidy needed based on economies of scale. CGCC has approximately $1.75 million in ARPA funds allocated by the State for this project and will likely seek additional resources if the project is able to move forward. CGESD is now project lead.	Childcare needs (costs, lack of access) is a priority strategy in the CEDS. Addresses support for workforce participation.
4	Sherman and Wasco Counties, Q-Life	**Broadband** Sherman: The County has completed fiber to the home in the cities and connected each community to a fiber backbone. The County has also purchased four solar-powered trailers with mounted repeating antennas that can pick up the signal from wireless towers and redirect the signal to homes that are not in the direct line of those towers. They would like to continue this project into more areas to reach those hardest to serve. Q-Life and Wasco County: Q-Life is working to clearly identify gaps in broadband service availability for communities across Wasco County, develop strategies to address key areas, and preparing for funding resources at the State and Federal levels. Additionally, Q-life is developing an improved colocation facility in The Dalles where providers and emergency communications networks can meet and access scalable communication paths. They completed initial designs for the facility with a cost estimate of approximately $1 million. Additionally, Q-Life is working to ensure that communities across the County are connected via fiber to support strong last mile connection opportunities.	Broadband is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Regional in nature. Adds resiliency to the region.
5	City of Hood River	**Hood River Elevated Sewer Line** The existing elevated sewer main on the south side of the interstate is very old, exposed and there is no means to divert or stop the flow if there is a break on the main, with potentially catastrophic environmental costs. This project will install a lift station and re-route the sewer line. Total project cost estimate: $6.7M with $6.4M still needed.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Addresses key business needs. Adds resiliency to the region.
6	City of The Dalles, Klickitat County, CGCC	**Aviation Maintenance Training Hangar and Industrial Park Development** City of The Dalles and Klickitat County are co-applicants for a successful $2.8 million EDA funding request to match a $700,000 local commitment to support college training program hangar and industrial park development at Columbia Gorge Regional Airport. Cost escalation since EDA proposal was submitted two and a half years ago has resulted in a projected shortfall of $1.9 million however. Klickitat County is seeking $500,000 grant from Washington State Department of Commerce and the City of The Dalles submitted a congressionally directed spending request for additional resources to close the gap on this project.	Addresses opportunities for key industry sectors, encourages development in an economically distressed area, opportunity for job creation.
7	City of Grass Valley	**Waste Water Project** The City of Grass Valley is researching construction of a municipal waste water system. The council hired an engineer to do a feasibility study in 2021 and that study is complete and has been presented to the community for feedback. The City had a One Stop meeting in 2022 and learned that the CWSRF program will be increasing its maximum forgivable loan amount. The City is waiting to hear details of the program changes (expected in early 2023) before proceeding with any funding applications. The City submitted a FY24 Congressionally Directed Spending Request for a portion of project costs. Estimated project cost is $6 million.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Opens opportunities for development. Adds resiliency to the region.
8	Port of Cascade Locks	**Business Park Infrastructure Development** Development of roads and other infrastructure related to commercial developments. Total cost: $3 million.	Addresses opportunities for key industry sectors.
9	Port of Hood River	**Lot 1** Lot 1 is the largest remaining light industrial property in Hood River. A significant infrastructure investment- specifically, water, sewer, and public streets - is necessary to prepare the site for industrial development to meet long term job creation and economic development goals of the community. Total project cost estimate: $4,800,000.	Addresses opportunities for key industry sectors.
10	City of Rufus	**Well #3 Feasibility Study & Upgrades** Primary well underperforming for years even with consistent maintenance. The City is unsure about water levels or future capabilities of the well, so will be seeking funding to do further investigations and repair, if feasible, or for drilling a new well.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Adds resiliency to the region.

2023 Regional Priority Rank (Washington)

Rank	Sponsor	Project	Reasoning
1	Klickitat County	**Goldendale Pumped Storage Hydro** Project is a proposed $2 billion pumped-hydro energy storage project. Using existing pumping infrastructure from an old aluminum smelting facility, the closed-loop system would include three variable-speed reversible pump-turbines for a total generating capacity of 1200 MW and a total pumping capacity of 1552 MW. The project would provide a range of services to the grid to support reliability and resilience in addition to specifically balancing variable wind generation. A preliminary permit for the project was issued by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in March 2018.	Key industry sector impact and potential to open huge economic development opportunities regionally. Adds resiliency to the region.
2	Port of Skamania	**Cascades Business Park** Cascades Business Park is one of the few large remaining industrial sites in the Columbia River Gorge NSA that's within a one-hour drive of Portland. A market and feasibility study done in 2021 concluded that the business park could employ 379 people with an average salary of $56,000. Commercial/light industrial buildings are needed to provide the local employment. They have put in a request to the state for funding and have submitted a CDS request for federal funds for the project. The Port will reevaluate moving forward with CERB funds and an EDA application in spring of 2023.	Opens development in an otherwise severely land-constrained county. Addresses opportunities for key industry sectors.
3	City of Stevenson	**Cascade Ave Improvement** The condition of the existing water and sewer mains on Cascade Avenue pose health and sanitation concerns. The sewer line along Cascade Avenue is undersized for existing users. The waterline is AC pipe installed over 50 years ago. The project will replace the waterline with ductile iron and increase the sewer line to handle existing and future flows. It will also add decorative street lights to increase safety along the city's waterfront and match the look and feel of the rest of the city's Downtown area.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Addresses key business needs. Adds resiliency to the region.
4	Port of Klickitat	**Port of Klickitat Business Park Development** Dallesport Industrial Park -DIP Lot 39 Development: Port of Klickitat is seeking funds to complete a 5,000 sq ft light industrial building. This building will be the second of five buildings proposed for the future development of Lot 39 in Dallesport. Bingen Point Business Park: Task 1: BPBP Improvement Bring up to an additional 5 acres to shovel ready condition Task 2: Flex Building Construction of a 15,000 sq. ft. flex building Task 3: Marina Park Boat and Car Parking Pave boat and car parking area at Marina Park and Boat Launch in Bingen.	Addresses opportunities for key industry sectors and encourages development in an economically distressed area.
5	Skamania PUD	**Skamania County Water System Upgrades** Carson Water Treatment: This project includes final design and construction of a new 1 million gallon per day (MGD) drinking water treatment plant to serve the community of Carson. Project components include a pressurized membrane filter treatment system, clear well, finished water pumps, chemical storage tanks, on-site electric (chlorine) generation system and emergency generator in a 5,000 sq ft building. The pre-design report was finalized in 2022. Skamania PUD is looking for funding to cover the $5.95M project. Underwood Reservoir: This project includes final design and construction of a new 250,000-gallon welded steel water tank in Pressure Zone 3 in the unincorporated community of Underwood. The project will ensure clean, safe drinking water and allow for continued community growth. The pre-design report was finalized in 2022. Skamania PUD is looking for funding to cover the $1.75M project.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Opens opportunities for development. Adds resiliency to the region.
6	City of White Salmon	**Buck Creek Water Distribution Line Replacement** Replace 7 miles of deteriorating water main.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Addresses key business needs. Adds resiliency to the region.
7	Skamania County	**Wind River Road Stabilization** This project is to ensure long term safe access to the Carson and Stabler communities. The two access roads into this area are both failing due to the roadways sliding. This is also the gateway to the Gifford Pinchot National forest and heavily used by residents and visitors seeking recreation in the forest. The County is seeking funding to complete all phases of this project. Total project cost is estimated at $10 million. The County currently has $5 million secured.	Key infrastructure need. Resilience issue. Impact to key industry sectors.
8	Klickitat Valley Health Hospital District	**KVH Building Addition** KVH is seeking funding for an addition of 12,000 square feet for a new acute care unit, surgery department and long-term care unit, and 12,000 square feet of shell space for future growth.	Addresses key business, industry sector and resilience needs; opportunity for job creation.
9	City of Goldendale	**Waste Water Treatment Plant Improvements** Project includes grit removal, solids handling system, aeration system and process configuration system improvements.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Addresses key business needs. Adds resiliency to the region.
10	City of North Bonneville	**City of North Bonneville Lift Station Replacement** The City's lift station #3 continues to need constant maintenance and patching to function without the funds for complete replacement. Lift station #4 is also in need of upgrades, but priority is on #3. Continues to be high priority. The City is working on water and sewer rate studies.	Water/wastewater is a key infrastructure need outlined in the CEDS. Adds resiliency to the region.

APPENDIX E: REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS

Transportation Infrastructure Project Lists

This list of projects was prioritized through the Connect Mid-Columbia meetings held in conjunction with the CEDS update to expand transportation discussions. The assessment uses a high-medium-low assessment of how the project aligns to each criteria listed in the columns.

XXX   Strongest alignment to criteria

XX   Performs well to criteria

X   Moderately aligned to criteria

Table 1. Top 12 Regional Transportation Infrastructure Project Priorities from Connect Mid-Columbia Process

Project Name	CEDS Connection	Community Ranking / Project List	Economic Impact	Regional Significance	Geographic Disbursement	Avail. of Funds on Hand	Readiness to Proceed
Hood River– White Salmon Interstate Bridge Replacement	XXX	Top Choice for Hood River County, Klickitat in CEDS	XXX	XXX	Hood River, Klickitat	XX	XXX
Bridge of the Gods Rehabilitation	XXX	Top for Port of Cascade Locks, Hood River County in CEDS	XXX	XXX	Hood River, Skamania	X	X
Columbia Avenue Realignment in Stevenson	XXX	Top for Skamania Co. in CEDS	XX	XX	Skamania	X	X
Fuel Farm Upgrades at Columbia Gorge Regional Airport	XXX	Top for Wasco County in CEDS	XX	XXX	Wasco	XX	XX
Wasco Road Resurfacing Project	XXX	Top for Sherman Co. in CEDS	XX	X	Sherman	XX	XXX
E. Anchor Way and North First Street Development	XX	High for Port of Hood River	XXX	X	Hood River	XX	XXX

Project Name	CEDS Connection	Community Ranking / Project List	Economic Impact	Regional Significance	Geographic Disbursement	Avail. of Funds on Hand	Readiness to Proceed
Historic Highway State Trail Completion	XX	ODOT R 1 Priority	XX	XX	Hood River	XX	XX
US 97 Moro-Grass Valley pavement preservation and passing lanes	X	ODOT Region 4 Priority	XX	XX	Sherman	XXX	XXX
SR – 14 Rockfall Protection	XX	Skamania County RTP	XX	XX	Skamania	XX	XX
SR 14 Realign Curves near Cape Horn	X	Skamania RTP Priority	XX	XX	Skamania	X	X
US 30: WaNaPa at Toll House Road	X	STIP Enhance	X	XX	Hood River	XX	XX
Cascade Ave (Exit 62-Mt Adams Ave) Improvements	X	STIP Enhance	X	X	Hood River	XX	XX
US26– Wapinitia Junction – Warm Springs River: Pavement Preservation	X	ODOT Region 4 STIP		X	X	Wasco	XX
Mosier Streetscape (US 30)	X	ODOT Region 4 Priority	X	X	Wasco	X	X

Table 2. Additional High Priority Transportation Project for Mid-Columbia Region*

Project Name	Identified Plan/ Community Priority	GeographicImpact
Forest Lane/WaNaPa Reconstructions	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Cascade Locks
Port of Cascade Locks Recreational Infrastructure	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Cascade Locks
Gravel Pit Road Rebuild	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Cascade Locks
Cascade Locks Truck Route Improvements	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Cascade Locks
City of Hood River Intersection Improvements – Oak/2nd	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Hood River
Reconstruction of Barker Road (Hood River County)	Hood River County CEDS List	Hood River County
Goldendale Municipal Airport Improvements	Klickitat County CEDS List	City of Goldendale
SR -14 Oaks to Maple Roundabout or Signal (Bingen)	Klickitat RTP	City of Bingen
SR -14 Downtown Bingen Improvements (Ped Crossing, Sidewalks)	Klickitat RTP	City of Bingen
Reconstruct Existing Rural Arterials to All-Weather Roads in Klickitat County	Klickitat RTP	Klickitat County
Cascade Locks Truck Route Improvements	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Cascade Locks
Herman Creek Lane Rebuild	Hood River County CEDS List	City of Cascade Locks
Celilo Frontage Rd Rail Crossing Improvements	ODOT Region 4 STIP	Wasco County
North Central Culvert Corridor Project	ODOT Region 4 STIP	Wasco, Sherman Counties
Ken Jernstedt Airfield	Port of Hood River	Hood River County
Dallesport Industrial Park: Develop Second Barge Dock, Improve Rail Spur	Port of Klickitat	Dallesport
Paving: Dock Road to Barge Dock, Parallel Avenue from Dow Rd to 151 C in Dallesport	Port of Klickitat	Dallesport
First Street Traffic Calming & Sidewalk Pedestrian Path Connection in Stevenson	Skamania County CEDS List	City of Stevenson
Upper Russell Avenue Upgrades in Stevenson	Skamania County CEDS List	City of Stevenson

Project Name	Identified Plan/ Community Priority	GeographicImpact
SR – 14 Bridge of the Gods Intersection Improvement	Skamania County RTP	Skamania County
SR – 14 Hot Spring Way / Dam (Cascades Business Park Access)	Skamania County RTP	Skamania County
Marine Park Pedestrian Overcrossing	Port of Cascade Locks	City of Cascade Locks
Mountain Fir Park Walking Path	Wasco County CEDS List	City of Maupin
Dufur Streetscape improvements	Wasco County CEDS List	City of Dufur
Mill Creek Greenway in The Dalles	Wasco County CEDS List	City of The Dalles

*Projects that have been funded in current Oregon STIP are not listed