

Public Comments /Testimony on Travel Oregon's 2022-31 Draft Transformational Strategy

The public comment period was posted on Travel Oregon's website and open from Jan 28, 2022 to Feb 21, 2022 at 5:00 p.m.

<https://industry.traveloregon.com/about/strategic-plan/2022-2031-transformational-strategic-plan/>

Written Comments:

- **Name:** Marianne Vydra
Region: Willamette Valley
Comment: Greetings, I was just reading through the Transformational Strategic Plan - with respect to the Land Acknowledgement - is it possible to create a revenue stream in each region to the Tribal Foundations/Projects located in each, as we all benefit from enjoying these lands.

- **Name:** Mark Ottenad
Region: Willamette Valley
Comment: One suggestion I believe to be in alignment with the Transformational Strategic Plan, RE OBJECTIVE 4 STRATEGIES: Recommend adding a strategy that focuses on public education regarding tourism industry climate-action plans, programs and projects.

- **Name:** Jon-Paul Bowles
Region: Portland Region
Comment: This plan is a welcome inflection point for the tourism industry in Oregon. We are at a tipping point. Managing visitor impacts through design and development is more important than promotion in the lives of many Oregonians. Given this reality, and the plan's focus on destination stewardship, equity, and climate, I hope to see a significant shift in resources, including budgets, to fund destination management relative to traditional destination marketing. Simply put, I hope to see transformational resource behind this transformational plan, which I fully support.

- **Name:** David C. Snider
Region: Mt. Hood & the Columbia River Gorge
Comment: One of the tourism-related items that deserves state support is the Mt Hood Express shuttle system currently operated by Clackamas County. This shuttle moves skiers and snowboarders as well as hikers and mountain bikers to outdoor recreation assets on Mount Hood. It starts in Sandy and ends at the ski resorts on the south side of the mountain. This service is rapidly expanding in popularity due to the parking issues at Timberline and Meadows. It is also a fantastic way to decrease carbon emissions by reducing the number of vehicles on Highway 26. Directly addresses all of the strategies contained in Objective 4. Also addresses Objective 2 (strategy 4) and Objective 3 (strategies 1, 3).

TRAVEL OREGON

- **Name:** Citizen
Region: Oregon Coast
Comment: Your strategic plan is based upon the very principals you claim to be battling against. In your effort to be inclusive you have purposefully, explicitly and derogatorily excluded a group of people simply based upon their skin color. This is a racist document and should be destroyed for the hateful and vile garbage it is.
The irony of this is hilarious given that the CEO is a white male. (your self hate is limited to you and should not be cast out on the masses)

By defining Equity as your pillar stone you are making an immediate assumption that there is not equity now. If you make that leap then you are forced to prove your claim that things are somehow inequitable because of something that your organization is doing.
If your organization is indeed currently operating in an inequitable manner then the simplest route is to fire all the racists working for your organization and re-hire people not educated in a liberal/ leftist racist lens. Hint: normal people do not see race and treat everybody equally.
Specific to your document: you wasted your money. A strategic plan is not 17 pages long. It is much more involved, looks at real problems and defines true actionable guidance. I could pick apart individual statements but the entire document is garbage.
Want more? Your KPIs are garbage. You have no way to measure what you are laying out. It would all be supposition and innuendo. Your tax payers deserve better.

- **Name:** Rashae Burns
Region: Portland Region
Comment: As a black native Oregonian, I do not like reading materials meant to as strategic plan support of my community that uses deficit language like marginalized to define the community you are seeking to uplift and empower. In doing this you are deflecting acknowledgment of racial disparities the state's history has of exclusion for the BIPOC communities and Tribes in Oregon tourism. If we are talking about being inclusive to all then the strategies should call in those communities directly instead of continuously referring to them as marginalized. You lose the intention of who this transformation is serving when not calling it in directly. I would like to hear more actions or examples of steps you will take in the strategies. Where are the anticipated outcomes that you are striving to achieve to measure the progress of the strategic plan?

Was this Strategic plan about inclusivity and equity led by a person in the BIPOC community?



- **Name:** Kari Westlund
Region: Willamette Valley
Comment:

Chair Youngblood and members of the Oregon Tourism Commission,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft Transformative Plan. A ten-year strategy document provides an important framework and clarifies priorities for focus for biannual and annual cycles of work.

The draft plan beautifully articulates values we all hold dear, And it articulates societal outcomes that we all value. That it says so much, with such brevity, is commendable.

But when I read it, I felt something essential was missing; that perhaps the Oregon Tourism Commission, dba Travel Oregon, was overlooking or understating its primary purpose.

Travel Oregon is in a position of trust. It has a responsibility and is accountable for its unique economic development role in ensuring the economic vibrancy of the visitor industry and lodging sector.

It needs to embrace this role, articulate it in this plan and every plan, and clearly claim it as its mission and primary focus.

I am hopeful that the Commission will ensure that this important recognition of role and responsibility is clearly prioritized in this, and any other strategy document or plan published out by Travel Oregon.

As I read the draft carefully, I took the concept of regenerative thinking to heart, and I wondered what the future holds for the carefully crafted partnership between industry and government that funds Travel Oregon. If funding at the state level for Travel Oregon is lost, so is funding at the local level. Everything we worked so hard for unravels.

More clearly articulating Travel Oregon's primary mission in growing the visitor economy is imperative to maintaining its connection to its funding source.

Please ensure that stakeholders be allowed an opportunity to review and comment on a revised draft before it is formally adopted. I realize timelines are short, but the gap in the current draft is significant and very important.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my perspective and input on this important long term strategic document.

- **Name:** Alana Hughson
Region: Portland Region
Comment:

Dear Chair Youngblood and Members of the Oregon Tourism Commission:
Thank you for the opportunity to present comment on the Draft 10-Year Transformational Strategy for Travel Oregon.

The Oregon Destination Association (ODA) is comprised of more than 60 Destination Management and Marketing Organizations (DMOs) from across Oregon. Our stakeholder DMOs are the grassroots, boots on the ground tourism engine in every local and regional destination within Oregon. As a statewide tourism industry association, and partner with Travel Oregon, ODA is charged with being the statewide eyes, ears and voice for the collective of our unique and diverse DMO stakeholder priorities.

Undertaking transformational planning for the tourism industry is a daunting task. We are grateful that Travel Oregon embraced the challenge to lead our industry as we emerge from this unprecedented and extended period which has been overshadowed by a global pandemic and a variety of societal and environmental impacts.

As presented, the Draft plan is a beautifully written, broad foundation to guide the work of Travel Oregon over the next decade. We entrust that our careful review and key comments will help support and shape the evolution of the Draft Plan.

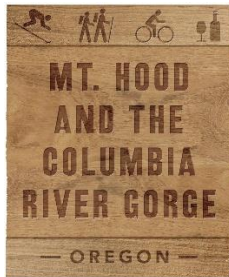
ODA stakeholders have entrusted Travel Oregon to lead the tourism charge passionately and responsibly for the state. This Plan is the opportunity for Travel Oregon to boldly identify and invite actionable tourism leadership strategies and tactics that will continue to align and unify Oregon's tourism industry for the next decade.

The Draft Plan is inspiring and aspirational. However, we encourage Travel Oregon to expand the broad foundation of the Plan to clearly define actionable strategies in two key areas of DMO priority:

- Articulate and prioritize the primary tenet of tourism as a key economic driver for Oregon by defining strategies and tactics to inspire off-peak, overnight visitation to Oregon's diverse destinations; thereby resulting in year-round employment for tens of thousands of Oregonians contributing to statewide economic vitality and stability
- Prioritize defining and communicating to DMO stakeholders about the proposed changes in Travel Oregon's organizational structure and operations. This will ensure statewide industry stakeholders know with whom and how to best support, leverage and incorporate Travel Oregon priorities within DMO local and regional destination planning

In closing, this process is too vitally important to rush, and we ask that Oregon's tourism industry stakeholders be allowed the opportunity to review, engage and comment on a revised draft of the Transformational Plan before it is formally adopted by the Commission.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Respectfully submitted for ODA by Alana Hughson.



Dear Travel Oregon Staff and Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Transformational Planning process and for the opportunity to comment on the Draft 10 Year Transformational Strategic Plan.

While there are components to this plan that feel true to where the industry is ready to go, there is so much context missing in it that makes it hard to understand what it means for Travel Oregon and tourism in the state. On behalf of the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Region and our local DMOs, I would like to provide the following public comments and key questions for Travel Oregon staff and Commission to consider:

Where is tourism in this Strategic Plan?

Tourism is the tool that we, as the industry, and Travel Oregon, as the steward of our industry, utilize to build a positive impact in the state of Oregon. That point feels lost in the majority of this plan. The why and how tourism can be, and is, an important tool in meeting the stated core values, and in working towards this mission and vision, is not stated clearly in this document and thus makes it really hard for the industry to see themselves in it. What is missing is the structure for our partners to be able to see how the work that they do now and in the future relates to the vision put forward.

The economic impact value of tourism is missing.

The omission of talking about tourism's role as an economic driver for the state is concerning. This really should be the third lens with which Travel Oregon's work is filtered through, in addition to racial equity and destination stewardship. Tourism creates jobs for residents. Tourism supports our small businesses from metro areas to rural communities. Tourism builds and enhances experiences for residents that enhance livability. And without tourism's economic support, there would be no tourism dollars for us to accomplish the values and goals stated in this document.

This document reads like an aspirational values statement, not a Strategic Plan.

The Strategic Plan reads like a high level, aspirational, values statement. Feedback from my partners in the region included "these are pretty words" and "this is so aspirational that it comes across as inauthentic." There are a lot of great points and values within it, but there's no meat to a strategic plan here. How do these values relate to our work in the past and moving forward into the next 10 years? What does tourism's role look like? How is Travel Oregon accountable to this work? It almost comes across as pandering by calling this document a strategic plan when there is no real plan here.

The language of the Strategy is not written for all Oregonians.

I really appreciate that the document includes a section dedicated to key terms, but even with those, one of my first concerns reading it was that I have partners in some of my communities who do not use this same lexicon and will not see themselves and their tourism work in this document. A common language understood by all is the way to bring everyone on board. Otherwise this plan, and its forthcoming work, will likely start to alienate partners who we should be trying to support and bring with us.

Using a Destination Stewardship lens is not a transformational "dramatic change" for Travel Oregon nor for tourism partners around the state. It is already a core part of what we do.

This plan calls out that using a Destination Stewardship lens is a transformational “dramatic change” for Travel Oregon and Oregon’s tourism industry. It is not. In our region alone we have invested in destination stewardship for over 5 years. Travel Oregon has been at it for over a decade. I am excited to see it represented at such a high level in this new plan, but I think it is critical to recognize the history of destination stewardship work led by the tourism industry to show how far we have already come and the opportunities to expand upon it into the future.

In addition to the comments above, I have some more specific feedback to provide on components of the 10 Year Transformational Strategic Plan.

- Where is the data to back up how and why this plan will be transformational?
- Under Core Values, where integrity is outlined, I would love to see “acknowledge shortcomings” listed as well as celebrating successes. I think as a whole our industry struggles to talk about things that didn’t work, and only wants to highlight wins. This can be a disservice to many when some of life's greatest learnings come from failures. If we can’t feel comfortable sharing those challenges, we will hold back our industry’s future success.
- Where you list the three focus areas that stakeholders prioritized in the research leading up to this plan, those were the main three topics we were told to provide feedback on.
- I appreciate having a key terms definition section. I would suggest adding some more terminology to it that is used throughout the document.
 - Add Social equity
 - Add Socio-economic impact
- Comments about the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
 - I am curious why none of these KPIs are qualitative. I think it is time for our industry to evolve our performance with more holistic performance tracking with both quantitative and qualitative KPIs. The 4 listed here do not fully encapsulate the value of the work that we do.
 - I am also curious how these KPIs will be tracked. Do we even have the capacity to calculate carbon emissions for the entire industry? What lift is expected from tourism partners to help collect this data?
- I appreciate the alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals but wonder why the Tourism for SDGs, created by the UNWTO, was not used instead as it is the official tourism filter of the SDGs and frames the conversation around tourism in a more practical way than the larger SDG context and definitions do.
 - Objective 1: I would suggest adding SDG5 to this one, which is Gender Equity which aligns well with “Oregon is striving to be a place of equity.”
 - Objective 2: I don’t believe UN SDG3 is the correct fit here. This UN Goal is focused on global health with examples like sanitation, hygiene, functioning health systems, and the like. I don’t see how Oregon being recognized as a flourishing destination and the work of Travel Oregon relates to better health systems. Additionally, if you look at the UNWTO tourism connection to SDG3, it describes it as “Tax income generated from tourism can be reinvested in health care and services, improving maternal health, reduce child mortality and preventing diseases. Visitors fees collected in protected areas can as well contribute to health services.” Yet the strategies listed for this objective connect to storytelling and communication that address visitation patterns, tourism advocacy, and responsible recreation. The alignment here does not track.
 - Objective 2: I would add SDG 17, Partnerships for the Goals to this objective as that correlates well with Strategy 6 in this objective.
- Objective 3: Strategy 2: Significant education, training, and resources are needed across the industry on what regenerative tourism is and how folks can adapt their

business models before “stimulating and bolstering” this work in an equitable way can be accomplished. Also, I am concerned about only calling out rural communities and tribal lands here. If this is a critical focus area for the state it needs to be supported and bolstered in our metro areas as well.

- Objective 3: Strategy 3: While I appreciate the recognition that parts of Oregon are experiencing high visitation pressure that affect community livability, the strategy outlined here is lacking. Developing new product somewhere else provides no guarantee that it is going to reduce high visitation at other places. It might help spread length of stay, but won't necessarily divert traffic. What is also needed is resources and investment in better systems for visitation at our high use areas in conjunction with new product development.
- Objective 3: Strategy 4: Very happy to see this strategy listed in the plan. I would ask that “recently” be removed from the sentence though. As we have seen from communities in the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge region, 4 years after the Eagle Creek Fire the Gorge is still experiencing significant landslides and highway closures impacting nearby communities. 2 years after the Riverside Fire, Hwy 224 is still not open and rec sites have not been worked on yet, significantly impacting the tourism industry in Estacada. Their need for support from Travel Oregon and local DMOs extends beyond the moment the crisis happens and recently thereafter. Another option would be to reflect on the length of time a crisis may be experienced in the copy of this strategic point, that being immediate to multiple years.
- Objective 4: Strategy 2: I would suggest updating this to “mitigate negative visitor impacts and support positive visitor impacts.” Trail Ambassadors is a great example of a program currently supported by Travel Oregon that both mitigates negative impacts and supports positive ones. If Travel Oregon only focuses on negative impacts, they will always be in a reactive role. If the work is to be truly regenerative, supporting positive impacts for better visitation is just as important as mitigating negative impacts.
- Objective 4: Strategy 3: I love the idea of this strategy, but to be successful it requires more than just “providing opportunities to understand” the work. When you look at how many small businesses (1-5 employees) make up the tourism industry in the state, capacity and tools for executing this work is near impossible. Based off learnings from past training opportunities, additional capacity to help support follow through is a key piece missing in how this strategic point is written.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity as an RDMO and Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge representative to provide feedback and be a part of this process. It is exciting to see a glimpse of what tourism's transformation will look like over the next 10 years but I am concerned that the way it is presented in this document is not providing the right guidance and impact we as a destination were hoping to see.

I hope that the commission and staff take this feedback into consideration and I am more than happy to discuss my region's feedback in more detail if needed.

Thank You,
Lizzie Keenan

Regional Lead

Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Regional Tourism Alliance

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Feb. 10, 2022

Oregon Tourism Commission
319 SW Washington, Suite 700
Portland, OR 97204

RE: 2022-31 Transformational Strategic Plan

Dear Commissioners,

Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory would like to thank the Oregon Tourism Commission and Travel Oregon staff for their efforts and collaboration in developing Travel Oregon's Draft 2022-2031 Transformational Strategic Plan and for the opportunity to provide feedback.

We appreciate that racial equity and stewardship received elevated focus and that making improvements in these areas is incorporated into Travel Oregon's priorities for our state's tourism industry. There is shared value around these issues and there is certainly room for improvement. To that, we look forward to being an active partner in helping to bring about positive and meaningful change.

With that said, we have input and questions about the draft plan we wish to share. The values and benefits tourism brings to communities across the state have been significantly downplayed. While briefly referenced in a couple points enumerated on page five, they are not spoken to in the body of the plan. The plan needs to clearly reaffirm the value of tourism so it is not lost by the reader or those outside the industry.

Similarly, to say that looking at tourism through a stewardship lens is "transformational" leaves a reader with the impression that no effort or attention had previously been given when in fact much good work has been done by organizations and individuals within the industry. On these topics, the strategy comes across as dismissive of previous efforts, contributions and successes.

We whole heartedly share and support the aspirations and intentions that have been brought forth. And we agree that employing a "lens" approach will be a helpful tool in ensuring these values are in every program and decision. However, as drafted, the plan reads more like a value statement than an actionable plan. The language is so aspirational it begs the question "what does it mean?"

What is missing are details about how destination organizations and tourism partners can realistically influence the desired changes identified in the plan. What are our leverage points?

It is not a question of “is this tourism’s lane?”. Rather, the question is “what tools are available to us to get the job done?” We also have question about how some of the key performance indicators and outcomes can effectively be measured. For industry leaders and local tourism partners alike, to see our place in a plan, we need greater understanding of the roles we can play, the value we can bring and how success can be tracked.

We foresee that many of the strategies listed under the plans objectives will require significant investments in tools and resources for industry partners. While the plan will be Travel Oregon’s, most of the action required to bring about change will happen at the local and operator level. State-level goals, objectives, visioning, and trainings will not be enough.

This is important work that sets the stage for generations into the future and should not be rushed. With many questions left unanswered in the draft plan, we feel more time should be given before adoption to consider all feedback and how it informs this future vision. With thoughtful refinement of the plan, the adopted plan can be a tool to align tourism’s work strengthening our communities through the visitor and experience economies with the vision and values in a way that empowers industry partners to strive toward the vision set forth.

Again, we appreciate the Commission and Travel Oregon staff for their leadership in developing this roadmap for our industry and thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the draft place.

Sincerely,

Samara Phelps

Samara Phelps
Executive Director
Oregon’s Mt. Hood Territory