

OREGON TOURISM COMMISSION MEETING

April 14, 2025

Oregon Convention Center
777 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd
Portland, OR 97232

Tourism Commissioners present included: Chair DiNovo, Vice Chair Willitts and Commissioners Travis Hill, Harish Patel, Jenifer Roe, David Gremmels, David Penilton, Erin Stephenson and Scott Youngblood.

Welcome and Introductions

Chair DiNovo opens the meeting at 12:32 p.m. and welcomes everyone to the April 14, 2025, Oregon Tourism Commission meeting.

Chair DiNovo thanks everyone for being in Portland, noting that the meeting materials, including the agenda and supplemental materials can be found on the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Chair DiNovo states that in holding a meeting today, all Public Meeting notice requirements required by state law were met.

The Oregon Tourism Commissioners and Todd Davidson, CEO of Travel Oregon, introduce themselves.

Chair DiNovo states that there will be an opportunity to hear comments from partners. Those who plan to share remarks shall use the sign-in sheet.

Chair Remarks

Chair DiNovo shares her appreciation for returning to Portland for the 40th Annual Governor's Conference on Tourism, including the Industry Relations team for their thoughtfulness in including sustainability and accessibility. She acknowledges Thelma Haggemiller of Slow Poke Tours as an attendee of all forty conferences.

Chair DiNovo recognizes Travel Oregon employees Kevin Wright and Mo Sherifdeen for their 20-year anniversaries.

Chair DiNovo recognizes Oregon State University's recent reopening of Withycombe Hall which will feature a conference room named after Commissioner David Gremmels for his dedication to sustainable agriculture and innovation.

Local Welcome

Chair DiNovo welcomes Michael Cavanaugh, Director of Destination and Industry Affairs at Travel Portland, and Wela Negelspach, Director of Tourism at Columbia County, to join us today.



Michael walks the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation (Exhibit A):

- Portland Region description
- Columbia County and introduction of Wela Negelspach
 - Freewheelers of Vernonia: Vernonia Gateway Sign
 - St. Helens Waterfront Redevelopment
 - Clatskanie
 - Scappoose Bay Marina
 - St. Helens Hotel & Klondike Tavern
- RCTP Strategic Investments: Tualatin Valley
 - Paddler's Guidebook, Map and Website
 - Scoggins Valley Park Art Panels
- RCTP Strategic Investments: Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory
 - Willamette Falls & Landings Heritage Areas
 - Pickathon: Creative Neighborhoods
- RCTP Strategic Investments: Gresham Area Chamber of Commerce
 - Festival of the Arts Gresham
- RCTP Strategic Investments: Travel Portland
 - Oregon Historical Society: Rivers, Roses & Rip City
 - Lloyd EcoDistrict
- Other Travel Portland Investments
 - FY2025 Visitor Experience Enhancement Grant Awards

Commissioner Penilton shares his appreciation of the Oregon Tourism Leadership Academy being hosted at Klondike Tavern in St. Helens. He continues to share recognition of improvements to the Vernonia and Portland communities.

Commissioner Gremmels shares his enjoyment of the central city over the past few days in Portland.

Vice Chair Willitts appreciates the invitation to Portland events. He continues to recognize the innovations from vision to execution in Columbia County.

Chair DiNovo appreciates the presenters for their work and impact in the region.

Partners and Public Statements

Chair DiNovo states that on Monday, March 31, the Commission meeting notice was posted to the Commission Meetings webpage, notice was sent through Industry Communications and a link to the meeting agendas was posted.

Chair DiNovo reminds the group that the public comment period is an invitation to the industry to inform the Commission of updates, information, and constructive thoughts about Oregon's tourism industry. She reminds attendees that a comment form lives continuously on the industry website.

The Commission did not receive any comments in advance.



Chair DiNovo states that we have the opportunity for attendees to sign up in-person to speak with us. She requests that remarks remain respectful and professional and ask that comments be limited to 3 minutes.

Lizzie Keenan, Executive Director of Oregon's Mt. Hood Territory, introduces Ithaca Janzen as the new Regional Lead for the Mt. Hood and Columbia Gorge Region (RDMO).

Commission Business

Review of Commission Packet

Chair DiNovo asks if all Commissioners have received and had a chance to review their Commission packet – including the financials. All commissioners answer affirmatively.

Financial Update

Chair DiNovo thanks Vice Chair Willitts, Commissioners Penilton, Todd and Kathleen Stewart for reviewing the financials prior to this meeting.

Vice Chair Willitts shares the financials including the April TLT deposit. With the April deposit, Travel Oregon has received \$33.1M in TLT revenue which represents 75% of budgeted \$44.14M. Fiscal year to date TLT is up 1.6% compared to FY24; this is behind pace of our budget of \$44.1M but is in line with the forecast updated in February, \$42.5M. All departments have been preparing for this likely reduction in revenue. We continue to closely monitor TLT as the fiscal year closes; noting that we will have final TLT at the end of July when the Department of Revenue posts end of fiscal year accruals.

Commissioner Gremmels asks for an update on the biennium's revenue forecast and any impact from receiving fewer federal grants. Todd answers that a previous EDA grant supported the World Athletics Championships Oregon22. Furthermore, there is an existing cost share agreement with the US Forest Service and those dollars are secure, but the future is unknown.

Chair DiNovo shares her appreciation for Vice Chair Willitts and Commissioners Penilton and Youngblood for their advocacy at the recent Destination Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. to connect with Oregon's elected officials.

Todd shares that the Destination Capitol Hill delegation met with every Congressional office including many members. Congressional offices requested more information especially about impacts from Canadian visitors. The delegation dinner included attendance from Congresswomen Dexter and Bynum.

Commissioner Penilton shares his appreciation of the staff for their logistical work and to Alana Carollo, Eastern Oregon Visitors Association, and Tori Middelstadt, Willamette Valley Visitors Association for their participation. Personally advocating for united travel policies is paramount to the industry.

Vice Chair Willitts shares that Congressional offices requested Canadian travel impact numbers as they are aware of the downturn.

Commissioner Youngblood acknowledges that Congressional offices understand the impact of the travel and tourism industry locally and nationally and encourages future participation for all who can attend.

Commission Action

Approval of Minutes (February 2025)

Chair DiNovo shares that Commissioners were sent the draft February 2025 Commission meeting minutes via email on March 31 and asks if there are any questions or comments regarding these documents.

Chair DiNovo takes a motion for approval.

- Commissioner Gremmels moves to approve and Commissioner Patel seconds the motion.
- Chair DiNovo asks that all in favor say 'aye'. Commissioners Hill, Youngblood, Roe, Gremmels, Patel, Penilton, Stephenson, Vice Chair Willitts, and Chair DiNovo say 'aye'.
- Chair DiNovo asks for any opposition.
- Hearing none, the motion carries.

The February 2025 Commission meeting minutes are approved and will be posted to the Commission Section of the Travel Oregon Industry website.

Chair DiNovo shares that the draft 2025-2027 Strategic Plan and Budget was shared with the Commission on April 2 ahead of its release with the broader industry.

Chair DiNovo nominates Vice Chair Willitts and Commissioners Penilton and Gremmels to serve as a committee to review the health of the organization as we approach the midpoint of the 10-Year Vision.

Governor's Conference on Tourism Preview

Todd states that the first report today is previewing the Governor's Conference on Tourism from Lisa Itel, Director of Industry Relations, and Jaime Eder, Industry Development Manager.

Lisa and Jaime walk the Commission through a PowerPoint presentation previewing the Governor's Conference on Tourism (Exhibit B) including:

- Conference theme: "Then, Now, Forever"
- What's New: Conference Workshops
- Elevate Voices
- Accessible Conference
- Conference Partners: Stronger Together
- Conference Sustainability
- Keynote Speakers
- Night Out at Providence Park

Todd asks if there are any questions for the presenters.

Chair DiNovo shares her inspiration from the Industry Relations team and acknowledges how their work thoughtfully pulls in the 10-Year Strategic Vision.

Commissioner Youngblood echoes the appreciation and thoughtfulness in terms of sustainability and accessibility. He encourages conference attendees to hear from a Dutch travel writer as she discusses accessible travel later in the conference.

Commissioner Hill acknowledges Lisa's work with the Tribal Tourism Working Group and for leading Wednesday's panel from the working group.

Commissioner Penilton shares his excitement for the keynote speakers.

Todd acknowledges Wela Negelspace's contributions to the tourism industry as her role is now 100% tourism facing. He continues to acknowledge Michelle Liberty's recent appointment to a Board position with the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA).

Greg Eckhart, Director of Global Sales, introduces the Travel Oregon contractors representing international markets.

Chair DiNovo recesses the meeting at 1:52 p.m.

Chair DiNovo reconvenes the meeting at 2:09 p.m.

2025-27 Strategic Plan

Todd states that the next update will come from Petra Hackworth, VP of Insights and Impact, and Bryan Mullaney, Director of Strategy, Research and Analytics.

Petra and Bryan provide the Commission with a PowerPoint presentation sharing the draft 2025-27 Strategic Plan (Exhibit C) including:

- Regrounding in the Strategic Mission and Vision
- Travel Oregon values
- 10-Year Vision Journey: 3.5 Biennial Plans Left
- 2025-2027 Strategies
- Tourism Industry Partner Survey (TIPS)
- TIPS Results
- Objectives and Strategies
- Required to Operate
- Definitions: Core Delivery
- Core Delivery Strategies
- Definitions: Action Plans
- Action Plan Strategies
- Definitions: Pending
- Pending Strategies
- Measuring Progress
- KPI Baselines

- KPI Goals
- Strategic Vision Dashboard
- KPI Areas of Focus
- 2025-27 Strategic Plan Proposed Budget
 - Revenue Forecast update
- 2025-27 Legislative Fiscal Office state classification code format
- 2025-27 Draft Strategic Plan Proposed Budget for Wine Country License Plate Program
- Strategic Plan Next Steps
- Strategy Overview

Todd thanks the presenters and asks if there are any questions.

Commissioner Patel asks how visitor behavior can be improved. Bryan answers that an action team has been established to address the issue and shares some examples of what sorts of visitor messaging is needed to improve behavior.

Commissioner Patel asks why destination marketing and/or management representatives outperformed lodging representatives on the Tourism Industry Partner Survey. Bryan answers that the statistics do not represent the workforce numbers, rather the respondent rate. Commissioner Youngblood acknowledges that the slide includes data from the top six industries, but more information is available. Chair DiNovo acknowledges that some of the sector language is specific and may have limited the choice of sector.

Commissioner Stephenson acknowledges the staff work to develop the draft plan as the tone and voice are more approachable and the structure leads to more tangible work. She asks about the importance of measuring and monitoring, especially around environmental impacts. Petra answers that VP of Destination Stewardship Kevney Dugan will lead an action team to baseline numbers.

Commissioner Penilton acknowledges Bryan and the team's work to prepare the KPIs as they had been mentioned in December 2024. He continues to stress the importance of diversity in the workforce.

Commissioner Gremmels thanks the presenters for keeping the Commission informed and a part of the strategic planning process. He shares his gratitude for prioritizing diversity and community in the draft plan.

Chair DiNovo appreciates a greater understanding of the revenue forecast and commends the Travel Oregon team for developing the draft plan.

Commissioner Youngblood shares appreciation for the relatable voice of the draft plan.

Changing Landscape of Search & AI

Todd states that the final update will come from Mo Sherifdeen, Director of Integrated Marketing, Wade McCarthy, Paid Media Manager, and Jessie Kirk, Products and Platforms Manager.

Mo, Wade and Jessie share a PowerPoint presentation detailing changes to search and artificial intelligence (Exhibit D):

- Shifting Tides of Web Traffic
- Zero Click Searches
- AI Overviews & AI Agents
- Life Beyond Google
- Adjusting in the Near Term
- Backfilling Organic Search
- Long Term Work
- Building Trust (E-E-A-T)
 - Experience, Expertise, Authority, Trust
- Search Engine Optimization
- Design Improvements
- Consumer facing Homepage Refresh
- Drop-Down Menu
- AI Chatbot Travel Planning
- Rising Tides Lift All Boats in terms of bots, AI and accessibility

Todd acknowledges the proactive nature of the work and asks if there are any questions.

Chair DiNovo appreciates the passion of the presenters and asks to clarify ‘evergreen’ campaigns. Wade clarifies that evergreen or ‘always on’ advertising campaigns are encouraged so optimization can be achieved with a constant market presence.

Commissioner Youngblood asks if there will be an update for tourism businesses to be able to interact with TravelOregon.com as the authoritative figure. Mo answers that optimizations have been made to the Oregon Tourism Information System (OTIS), but businesses can always provide better content and images to uplift their stories. The editorial team is always on the lookout for stories highlighting Oregon’s people and places.

Vice Chair Willitts asks how much of this information is available to the DMOs and RDMOs. Jessie answers that information is being added to the industry website and newsletter in addition to the conference material. Jessie is meeting with the RDMOs to understand their needs as well. Mo adds that Cecilia Suvagian hosts an ongoing webinar series to optimize Google business listings.

Commissioner Hill asks if zero click search statistics are impacting search ad buys. Wade states that Google ad buys have increased while keeping cost per click down. Other channels are being utilized to drive traffic back to the Travel Oregon website.

Commissioner Gremmels asks if the AI chatbot will receive a name. Jessie answers that the last advertising campaign featured mascots and the AI chatbot is yet to be named or branded.

Chair DiNovo commends the presenters on their forward thinking and trustworthy presentation.

Other Business

Chair DiNovo asks if there is any additional business or announcements from Commissioners.

Vice Chair Willitts shares that the Sisters rodeo will be June 11-15.

The next Oregon Tourism Commission meeting will be May 7 to receive public comment on the draft 2025-2027 Strategic Plan and Budget and on June 9 & 10, 2025, in Enterprise. More information will be posted to the industry website as soon as it's available.

Chair DiNovo adjourns the meeting at 3:31 p.m.