Cascade Loop Info

- Formed in 1978
- Non-Profit
- Created as a way to generate economic health in the rural and unincorporated areas of the state by utilizing transportation infrastructure that was already in place
- Tourism promotion includes advertising, social media, public relations, product placement, printed and digital products
- All of the promotion in the world doesn’t make a difference however, if the experience doesn’t measure up
Cascade Loop—a Sample of WA

- From a tourism perspective, the Cascade Loop is a solid sample of the things travelers love about Washington State—Seattle access, hiking/mountaineering, climbing, rafting, fishing, wine tasting, paddle boarding, farmland and locally-sourced foods, the Arts, and friendly colorful locals.

- From a transportation perspective, the Cascade Loop showcases our state’s diversity as well—Interstate freeways, state highways, county and city roadways, state ferries, privately-owned ferries, international and county airports, rail and bus systems, traditional and electric vehicles.

- The Cascade Loop is fully accessible to EV travelers with charging stations all along the roadway.
Role of Transportation

- Typically transportation is what links travelers to their destination and attractions
- In the case of The Cascade Loop and other scenic byways in our state, transportation is a key part of the destination and takes on a more significant role--when the transportation infrastructure fails, the traveler’s vacation fails.
Positives About Present Infrastructure

- Most roadways are in great condition compared to other scenic byways in the US
- Most roadways are easy to access and depart
- Current buildout of EV Charging Stations make tourism possible for a growing sector of in-market travelers
- While maintenance projects can be cumbersome for travelers and residents, they are essential in the long term and appreciated
- Mix of International and Regional Airports is healthy for long-haul and in-market travel
High Impact Successes

- Ongoing build-out of cruise terminals and marina access
- WS DOT support manufacturing and installing Cascade Loop byway signage making the roadway easier to follow
- WS DOT addition of Rice roundabout in Sultan—a start in easing Hwy 2 congestion
- WS DOT continued chip and seal, striping and guardrail replacement projects keeping road travel safer for travelers
- WS DOT replacement of Skagit River Bridge
- WS DOT speedy repairs to roadway washouts and landslides in Chelan, the Methow Valley and the North Cascades
Transportation Challenges—Capacity Deficits

• Hwy 2—Monroe to Sultan
  • Daily significant traffic slowdowns and backups 3 p.m. – 7 p.m.
  • Traffic significantly backed up from 11am to 7pm every Sunday

• Approaching and departing Leavenworth
  • Traffic significantly backed up during weekends
  • Peak season is now really year-round now, so what used to be a seasonal inconvenience is now a regular reality

• Wenatchee—north end access from highway
  • Daily slowdowns

• Skagit Valley
  • During the months of April and May during peak festival seasons—Tulip and Daffodil seasons, traffic is backed up through Mt. Vernon, La Conner, county roads and I-5

• Whidbey Island
  • Ferry traffic slowdowns daily—Clinton
  • Daily slowdowns due to residential and NAS traffic—Oak Harbor, Banta Road, Deception Pass
Transportation Challenges—Winter Weather Impacts

- North Cascades Highway (SR20)
  - Winter closure has massive financial ramifications for the Methow Valley and businesses approaching and in the North Cascades.
  - Each additional day that the highway remains closed represents thousands of dollars of lost tourism revenue and ultimately, millions of dollars lost each season when closures are extended.

- Stevens Pass (SR2)
  - Intermittent pass closures have significant financial ramifications for Leavenworth during the winter months when key events are scheduled.
  - Each day the Pass remains closed represents thousands of dollars of lost tourism revenue and ultimately, millions of dollars lost each season when closures are extended.
Transportation Challenges—Natural Disasters

- Wildfires, mudslides, landslides, flooding and roadway washouts represent huge impacts to traffic flow during summer and fall months in:
  - Leavenworth, Wenatchee, Chelan, Pateros, Twisp, Winthrop, Mazama and the North Cascades
- In some communities access may be fully obscured during these events
- Coordinated information and outreach from a public safety and tourism perspective could be built out and formalized
Transportation Challenges—Signage Process

• While we want to maintain the natural beauty of our state and do not want to see roadways cluttered with unnecessary signage, wayfinding and safety signage is lacking in many areas and can be cumbersome to have approved and implemented.
Hopes for the Future

• Tourism continues to grow and support our state and local economies!

• DOT works with us and partner agencies to:
  • Increase roadway capacity through the addition of roundabouts, coordinated stoplights, and the addition of frontage roads and/or new bypass roadways
  • Decrease the number of highway closures on Hwy 2 and decrease the amount of time Hwy 20 is closed during the winter due to snowfall and avalanche danger through increased staffing and snow removal/management equipment
Hopes for the Future

• DOT works with us and partner agencies to:
  • Develop improved disaster preparedness plans as pertaining to travelers and transportation infrastructure
  • Formalize communication processes pertaining to roadway impacts and closures
Conclusion

- The Cascade Loop and Washington State tourism as a whole depend heavily on the efforts of the WS DOT and we appreciate the hard work, dedication and often, risks that are undertaken in the name of making transportation safe.

- Questions?