Oregon Department of Transportation

Research Stage 1 Problem Statement

Number 26-02 – "Enhancing Wildlife Crossing Structure Effectiveness with Improved Fence Ends to Reduce Vehicle Collisions"

1. Concisely describe the **transportation issue** (including problems, improvements, or untested solutions) that Oregon needs to research.

OSU-Cascades oversaw an 18-month effectiveness monitoring study of five wildlife crossing structures (WCS) and associated exclusion fencing on U.S. South Highway 97 (US-97) between mileposts 145-185 in central Oregon. Additionally, the project included a seventeen-year analysis of deer-vehicle collisions associated with the highway reach. This was the third monitoring iteration of the US-97 undercrossings and included two newly constructed undercrossings not included in the previous monitoring sessions.

Findings indicate that the combined passage rate at the five undercrossings was >70% for both ungulate species. However, exclusion fencing was limited in its utility to reduce deer-vehicle collisions. For instance, most (≥50%) of the ungulates that approached the exclusion terminus points (e.g., fence-ends) at the northern end of the Gilchrist study area bypassed the fenced area. This is likely due to the lack of a barrier preventing animals from exiting the exclusion fencing at these points. Literature review identified strategies used at fencing terminus points in similar projects which include terminating fences at topographical features like rocky outcroppings to limit breach rates.

2. What **final product or information** needs to be produced to enable this research to be implemented?

The objective of this project is to investigate measures and barrier designs that are more likely to keep large wildlife species out of the fence road corridor at fence-ends. Three ideas: rocky outcroppings, geotextile material, and extending fence lengths will be used to test new techniques to reduce wildlife walking around fence ends.

3. (Optional) Are there any individuals in Oregon who will be instrumental to the success of implementing any solution that is identified by this research? If so, please list them below.

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4. Decision making lenses

Please complete the following three sections. Your answers to these questions will be applied on a programmatic basis to support agency decisions. Answering yes to the questions below is not required. Resolving a narrowly focused technical research problem may meet agency needs without answering yes to any of the following questions. The ODOT Research Section will seek a balanced portfolio some

projects will answer yes to one of the three categories below (e.g. climate, equity, and/ or safety) and other projects in a different category.

We are looking for an overall program balance and no one project is expected to balance all categories. Generally, a research problem statement is expected to be able to answer yes with clear and verifiable information in only one of the three categories below, some projects may be able to answer yes in two or even three categories. Some projects (i.e. needs focused on specific elements of infrastructure design), may have no yes answers but may still be high value research need.

Climate

Oregon recognizes the climate crisis and makes systemic changes to reduce emissions caused by travel. Every mile driven in Oregon is powered by a clean source of fuel. We seek research that supports construction and maintenance operations are carbon neutral and investments in mobility that support travel by low and no emission modes. While every research project may not result in a reduction in emissions, transportation investments overall support emission reductions to achieve state goals. Oregon envisions a transportation system that is resilient in the face of seismic and climate events and impacts to the degradation of the natural environment are reduced. Our vision includes a transportation infrastructure is built in a way that avoids impacts on key habitat and results in better environmental conditions for wildlife and native vegetation. For definitions and details please review the equity vision, goals, and objectives of the ODOT Strategic Action Plan and Oregon Transportation Plan.

4f. Will addressing the **transportation issue** identified as a need in Question 1 develop, or validate methods for the estimation, measurement, or monitoring of transportation generated greenhouse gasses (GHG)?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4g. If climate or GHG is not the focus of this **transportation issue** identified in this problem statement, will the research apply a GHG analysis to transportation infrastructure, planning, operations, maintenance, or materials?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4h. Will the addressing the **transportation issue** include development or testing of construction practices, methods, or materials to establish potential reductions in greenhouse gas emissions?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4i. Will the solving the **transportation issue** in question 1 study or support the reduction of vehicle miles traveled and single occupancy vehicle travel or support transition to electric vehicles (or other types of zero emission vehicles) or low-carbon alternative fuels?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4j. Will the solving the **transportation issue** in question 1 lead to work that will support, measure, monitor, transportation system resilience in response to expected climate events, effects, or natural disasters in general?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4k. Will the solving the **transportation issue** in question 1 lead to work that may result in better environmental conditions for wildlife and native vegetation ?

☒Yes ☐No ☐Unsure

4l. If you answered yes to any of the climate questions above or can provide alternative details related to climate, please provide additional information:

Reducing WVCs will benefit native populations of mule deer and elk as well as numerous other species, as observed in previous wildlife passage projects.

Equity

Equity can have many dimensions and impacts relating to communities, and transportation. It is important that problem statement proposals clearly explain in what capacities are equity dimensions or impacts being examined within problem statements. It is a goal of the OTP to "Improve access to safe and affordable transportation for all, recognizing the unmet mobility needs of people who have been systemically excluded and underserved. Create an equitable and transparent engagement and communications decision-making structure that builds public trust". Proposed research may have the intent of studying elements of this goal or apply analysis to specific transportation topics to ensure the resulting research recommendations is consistent with our equity goals. For definitions and details please review the equity vision, goals, and objectives of the ODOT Strategic Action Plan and Oregon Transportation Plan.

4a Is the **transportation issue** identified as a need in Question 1 specifically focused on transportation equity?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4b If the **transportation issue** is not focused on transportation equity, will the primary topic be assessed for equity benefits or impacts within the research project?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4c Is the implementation of potential findings from this research likely to directly involve participation from an identified group that would benefit from an equitable process or outcome?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4d Is the intended final product or information expected to support ODOT's equity efforts (Including but not limited to supporting one of the equity related objectives of the ODOT's Strategic Action Plan or Oregon Transportation Plan) ?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4e If you answered yes to any of the equity questions above or can provide alternative details related to equity, please provide additional information:

Safety

Research outcomes may include interventions and countermeasures to prevent or reduce the frequency of crashes or other causes of transportation-related injury or death; or may include measures to reduce severity of injury (including prevention of death) after a crash or other injurious event. For definitions and

details please review the equity vision, goals, and objectives of the ODOT Strategic Action Plan, Oregon Transportation Safety Action Plan and Oregon Transportation Plan.

4m. Will solving the **transportation issue** in question 1 support improving **safety culture** for either transportation workers or the traveling public?

☒Yes ☐No ☐Unsure

4n. Will the solving the **transportation issue** support improving safety through **healthy and livable communities**?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4o. Will solving the **transportation issue** support improving safety through using **best available technologies**?

☐Yes ☒No ☐Unsure

4p. Will solving the **transportation issue** support improving safety through **communication and collaboration**?

☒Yes ☐No ☐Unsure

4q. Will the solving the **transportation issue** support improving safety through **investing strategically**?

☒Yes ☐No ☐Unsure

4r. If you answered yes to any of the safety questions above or can provide alternative details related to safety, please provide additional information:

Wildlife-vehicle collisions have been a growing problem in central Oregon, with the section of U.S. 97 south of Bend recording some of the highest number of collisions in the state over the past two decades. Wildlife crossings and exclusionary wildlife fencing result in the measured safety benefits from reduced collisions, including a reduction in wildlife-vehicle collisions by almost 90 percent. Further reductions in wildlife-vehicle collisions will benefit from reducing fence end effects.

5. Other comments:

6. Corresponding Submitter's Contact Information:

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