



DISABILITY RIGHTS OREGON

Disability Rights Oregon
610 SW Broadway, Portland OR 97205
Voice or TTY: 503-243-2081
800-452-1694
Email: welcome@droregon.org
www.droregon.org

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For more information: *Tom Fuller, (503) 986-3455 (ODOT)*

Bob Joondeph or Kathy Wilde (503) 243 2081 (DRO)

ODOT and DRO join forces to make Oregon's transportation system more accessible to people with disabilities

SALEM, Ore. In the largest commitment to an accessible transportation system in state history, the Oregon Department of Transportation, Disability Rights Oregon and the Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Living have reached a proposed agreement which will make the state highway system more accessible to those with disabilities. The agreement settles a February 2016 federal lawsuit against ODOT by the Association of Oregon Centers for Independent Living, and eight individuals with mobility and visual impairments throughout the State of Oregon that alleged noncompliance with Title II of the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

"ODOT is making an enhanced commitment to ensure that mobility and accessibility are key elements in its mission to provide a safe and efficient transportation system," said Tammy Baney, chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission. "Providing adequate curb ramps and pedestrian signals for those with disabilities helps improve the livability of our communities," said Baney and "honors their rights under federal disability laws."

"As a grass-roots network of people with disabilities across Oregon, we are pleased that consumer advocacy resulted in an agreement ensuring more accessible communities," said Barry Fox-Quamme, AOCIL Board President. "Listening to the voices of people with disabilities is vital for achieving enduring systems change."

For updated information on highway work and current travel information throughout Oregon, visit www.tripcheck.com or call the toll-free Oregon road report at 511 or (800) 977-6368.

Visit the ODOT News Media Center at www.oregon.gov/ODOT/COMM/.

"I am particularly pleased that ODOT is providing audible pedestrian signals at the request of an individual or community. Audible pedestrian signals will ensure that people with visual impairments can cross streets safely," said Plaintiff Carrie Taylor.

The agreement includes a quick-start commitment of \$5 million to address curb ramps and pedestrian signals in locations identified by the Association of Oregon Centers of Independent Living, with input from the community of people with disabilities. It is intended to get design work started as quickly as the locations are identified. The \$5 million will help start the effort to bring more than 10,000 curb ramps and 1,500 pedestrian signals into compliance with current legal standards under federal law.

In addition to the \$5 million as part of the agreement; \$18 million has been programmed in ODOT's State Transportation Improvement Program for spending on curb ramps and other ADA features beginning in the program cycle that begins in 2018.

Curb ramps and signals get upgrades

The agreement will lead to major improvements to pedestrian accessibility along the highway system including installing missing curb ramps to connect parts of communities that have been difficult or unsafe to access because of an incomplete system and upgrade substandard existing curb ramps to improve mobility and safety along the highways for all users.

ODOT will also improve pedestrian activated signals once the inventory is complete to ensure the reach, height, and landing meet applicable ADA standards, and will provide audible pedestrian signals upon request by a community or individual using an ODOT policy for requests of this type.

ODOT is creating a public complaint/request process by which people with disabilities can report problem curb ramps and have them remediated. There is also a process by which a person with a disability can request an audible signal.

Big changes over the next decades

Installing and improving curb ramps and signals, along with preserving and enhancing the transportation system is a big endeavor. Following the agreed upon schedule, ODOT will remediate at least 30 percent of the curb ramps by 2022, 75 percent by 2027, and will have completed the remediation by December 31st, 2032. ODOT will focus its efforts on high priority locations first.

"It's a difficult but doable undertaking," said Matthew Garrett, Director of the Oregon Department of Transportation. "But with this agreement, we as a Department commit to making our transportation system even more accessible for all Oregonians," said Garrett.

Expert assistance

An accessibility expert will provide assistance to ODOT during the period of inventorying, constructing and remediating ramps and signals. The expert will assist the department by reviewing and advising on such things as policies, procedures, standards and design exceptions. The accessibility expert will also consult on the creation of training for ODOT staff, conduct quality assurance field checks, provide a mechanism for dispute resolution and be a resource for ODOT and AOCIL through regular progress reports.

“It’s not enough to just build and remediate ramps,” said Bob Pappé, ODOT’s State Traffic-Roadway Engineer. “During construction, we need to ensure those in the disabled community have safe routes to travel. Our agreement calls for safe and accessible temporary routes through or around work zones.”

Legal action tentatively settled

Plaintiffs were represented by Disability Rights Oregon (Kathleen Wilde, Thomas Stenson, and Theodore Wenk), Stephen L. Brischetto, and Jon Strauhull of Legal Aid Services of Oregon.

A federal judge will review the agreement in the next few months to make sure it is fair to everyone affected, before the agreement takes effect.