

2016 Winter Roadway Guide

Fellow Eastern Oregonians and travelers, Hello and welcome to the 2015 edition of the Oregon Department of Transportation's Winter Roadway Guide. Although we didn't have a lot of snow last year, there were numerous days of freezing rain, dense fog, ice, high winds and other issues that created challenging driving conditions. We can't predict what Mother Nature will bring over the next few months, but we can all prepare by keeping winter safety in mind. That is why for over a decade ODOT has published this Winter Roadway Guide.

In these pages you'll find information about travel planning, preparing your vehicle for winter weather, and driving tips for staying safe under various road conditions. Useful Web links to videos, TripCheck.com and other information are also included, as well as updates about past and future projects.

New speed limits for I-84 and other routes

One of the projects ODOT crews and contractors are working on this winter will support Oregon House Bill 3402. This bill, enacted by the 2015 legislature, raises the speed limit on Interstate 84 and other state routes in eastern and central Oregon. The new law takes effect March 1, 2016, and will raise legal speeds to 70 mph for passenger vehicles and 65 mph for commercial trucks on I-84 between the Idaho border and The Dalles. Several secondary highways will see increased speeds to 65 and 60 mph for passenger vehicles and trucks. More information about HB 3402, what highways will see speed limits increased and what you can do to stay safe on Oregon roads will be posted on our ODOT Region 5 website at www.tinyurl.com/odot-region5. As we get closer to the March 1 date, we'll share updates through the media to keep everyone informed.

Variable speed limit project near Baker City

Another project involving speed limit signs will be constructed in 2016 along I-84 between Baker City and North Powder. ODOT's Variable Speed Limit Project will install new digital signs that can lower the legal speed limit when conditions warrant, such as when traffic has slowed or stopped due to a crash, or when severe weather conditions require everyone to slow down. The project site north of Baker City is located between the Elkhorn and Wallowa Mountains and has a history of unique winter weather patterns that can result in icy roads when other freeway sections are dry. A second variable speed limit project will be constructed in future years on the interstate near Meacham where ice, snow and dense fog are problematic. In both these areas the new signs will help reduce the number and severity of crashes, and help shorten the length of time the interstate is closed when an incident occurs.

Increased highway fatalities

One disturbing trend that Oregon and the nation are facing is a rise in traffic fatalities. Preliminary data

indicates traffic deaths in the state have increased more than 25 percent during the first 10 months of 2015 when compared to the same period in 2014. Fatal crashes increased 11 percent in 2014 over 2013 figures. This upward trend is following years of decline in Oregon traffic deaths.

One of the contributing factors to higher crash rates is an increase in distracted driving. Distraction comes in many forms from tuning the radio to eating a messy sandwich. The fastest growing distractions are cell phones and mobile devices. Talking on a non-hands-free device or texting while driving is illegal. It is also a common occurrence. We have all seen other drivers holding a phone to their ear or looking down at a small screen while behind the wheel. People may think a short distraction is not a problem, but in less than five seconds your vehicle has traveled the length of a football field at 50 miles per hour. ODOT and emergency responders who see the results of those few moments of distraction urge you to put your phones in the back seat. Make the choice to drive distraction-free, and get family members to pledge to do the same.

Key 2015 projects

ODOT will continue to construct projects and implement changes that are designed to reduce crashes and create a safer, more efficient transportation system.

This past year we added extra rumble strips on several highways, installed new sidewalks and updated pedestrian crossings in Pendleton and John Day, increased shoulder widths for bicycle riders on U.S. 26, replaced or repaired a dozen bridges and culverts, upgraded traffic signals in La Grande, Hermiston and Burns, and resurfaced over 350 lane miles of pavement. One of our biggest investments to date, the \$47 million I-84: Kamela to Second Street Project constructed west of La Grande will be completed this year. The three-year contract repaired seven bridges, upgraded median barriers, improved truck chain-up areas and resurfaced 16 miles of interstate, adding durable concrete in the truck lanes that will last for decades. A new third lane for slow moving westbound trucks was also added at Spring Creek Grade to help keep everyone moving, especially during winter weather. Additional projects are planned for the future that will continue to improve highway conditions.

More information about the above topics as well as numerous winter driving tips are covered in the pages of this publication. Please share it with other drivers in your household and keep it handy for future reference.

Thank you for keeping safety in mind this winter season,

Monte Grove
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Eastern Oregon Regional Manager

