Early Roads of Washington
Transportation as History
~Presentation~

Your Presenter
The first and honorable governor of the State of Washington
Elísha Peyre Ferry
What We Will Cover...

- Corps of Discovery – 1804-06
- From Sea to Shining Sea– 1806-1840
- Wagon Roads – 1840-1860
- Military Roads and Commerce—1860-1890
- Good Roads Association and WSDOT (early 1900s)
- Sunset Highway and I-90/ Snoqualmie Pass – Then and Now

Corps of Discovery – 1804-06

- Winter spent at Fort Clatsop.
- Lewis and Clark Expedition increased Awareness of abundant Western resources and ushered in American Manifest Destiny.
- Mounting Need for better trails and access to vast new resources which kindled the fur trade.
From Sea to Shining Sea – 1806-1840

- Place Names and Origins
- British occupation in the Pacific Northwest & declining fur trade
- Missionaries came out to the West (Whitmans arrive 1836)
- Original Trade Routes followed Traditional Indian Trails/ Western Outposts established/ Widen & expand trail networks
- (1846) Joint British-American Administration ended & all land south of the 49th Parallel was ceded to the U.S.
- News poured in of precious metal deposits – “Gold found in the Western Frontier!”

Wagon Roads – 1840 -1860

- (1848) Oregon Territory is Created
- Wagon Trains Needed more stable, widened corridors along traditional Indian paths
- Manifest Destiny (“Go West Young Man”)
- Oregon Trail Migration
  (Washington Territory formed March 1853 
  - After the Monticello Convention)
- Washington Settlement began 1850s (Spurred by the Donation Land Claim Act)
- Agriculture and Commerce demanded better road accessibility and durability
Military Roads and Commerce – 1860-1890

• Topographical Engineers were commissioned to survey for early roads
• Military Roads built from Fort to Fort as provisional routes to protect against hostile Indians but used increasingly by early settlers.
• First Military Road in Washington State – 1858.
• Funding Appropriations end at the Start of the Civil War (1860).
• County Roads, and Plats were built around early Military Routes.
• Military Roads quickly became critical supply routes to mines as lodes of gold and silver were discovered.

Good Roads Association and WSDOT

• East & West unite in the discovery of a route through the Cascades.
• (1896) Good Highways Convention meet to promote ‘better roads’.
• (1899) Good Roads Association originates under the foresight of Sam Hill and 13 other men.
• (1905) Highway Board is established and eventually becomes WSDOT
• The ‘Sam Hill Vision’ culminated in the establishment of a major east/west & north/south routes.
• These major routes were called Sunset Highway, Pacific Highway, and the Inland Empire Highway.
In 1859 a committee in Seattle solicited $1050 and organized a movement for opening a road over Snoqualmie Pass.

The Civil War stymied these efforts, but in 1865 several Seattle leaders restarted the push to get this road built.
Wagon road along Lake Keechelus in 1911 – The present day location of a vehicular I-90.
The first automobile finally crossed Snoqualmie Pass in June of 1905. There was even an auto race in 1909 from New York to Seattle via Snoqualmie Pass to help celebrate the Alaska-Yukon Exposition held in Seattle.

Some of the racers were said to comment that what is now Snoqualmie Pass was the hardest part of the race.
Even as late as 1931 a typical trip from Seattle to Central Washington took 2 days using this basic highway.
Views of Sunset Highway... Yesterday, & Today’s Interstate 90...
Thanks to WSDOT for use of some slides from their Centennial PowerPoint presentation

Washington State Department of Transportation
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