

## **Project Outline:**

Complete the pedestrian safety and accessibility project ODOT began previously by adding sidewalks and protected bike lanes to the north and south portions of Highway 101 that run through the City of Yachats.

## **Background:**

Yachats is a small but growing Oregon community whose economy is tourism based and whose population leans older; the median age in Yachats (64.1), is above the Lincoln County average (51.8) and the statewide average (39.5). And the median age has been increasing over the past decade creating an even greater need for alternatives to private vehicles.

Economically, using the U.S. Housing and Urban Development area median income estimate of \$55,800 as a gauge, more than 4 out of 10 households in Yachats could qualify as “low income”, earning less than 80% of the area median income. And based on the U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, this disparity affects a majority older population.

During the height of tourism season, which has expanded to encompass most of the year, the population increases greatly and the age range is extremely wide; from infants in strollers to the elderly using walkers and canes. The need for safe pedestrian paths as well as some form of accessible transportation options are needed, especially when considering the growth that has been seen in people moving, as well as visiting, Yachats.

Currently, like many communities struggling with a housing crisis, Yachats businesses employ many people who cannot afford to live in Yachats. According to YachatsNews.com, “..... *the rising cost of available housing – whether renting or buying – makes it difficult for hospitality workers making \$13 to \$20 an hour to afford a place to live.*” This causes those working in Yachats to bear the burden of car ownership. According to AAA's 2021 Your Driving Costs study the average annual cost of owning a new vehicle is \$9,666 per year, or \$805.50 per month. Without a combination of affordable housing choices and safe multimodal alternatives to driving disparities in wealth will continue to expand.

Like most cities along the Oregon Coast, Highway 101 serves as the commercial corridor and main street. ODOT completed a street redesign 5-6 years ago which extended sidewalks to a portion of the City. Left untouched were large sections to the north, where three affordable housing developments and three large hotels are located, and the south, which requires residents to walk along a narrow stretch of road where speeds exceed a safe limit for a shared road. Except for a small section in the center of the community most residents, visitors, and the workforce drive cars due to the real, and perceived, lack of safe alternatives.

Being centrally located along the coast Yachats has all the elements for a successful pilot project in rural transportation; an expanding economic divide, people with mobility issues, and an increasing influx of tourists adding to the environmental costs of single use vehicle dependence. Developing safe pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and a regional transportation plan here could be the start of an interconnected system for the coastal region.