Governor's Transportation Vision Panel

Intercity passenger rail service connects several of Oregon's communities and is part of the federally-recognized rail system that connects cities all over the United States. ODOT and WSDOT pay for the Cascades service, which Amtrak operates. In 2010, ODOT purchased two new trainsets using federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, providing trains for continued Amtrak Cascades service in Oregon. Oregon's lack of dedicated, sustainable funding for rail is one of the top challenges facing passenger rail in the state. Without funding, Oregon does not have a revenue source available to operate, maintain or enhance the passenger rail service.

Passenger Rail Vision Statements

4-Year Vision

Optimize ridership and revenue of the Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service in Oregon to ensure continued funding.

20-year Vision[1]

Improve the frequency, convenience, speed and reliability of the passenger rail service along the Oregon segment of the federally designated Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor (PNWRC).

Vision for 2035 and Beyond[2]

Building on a well-connected transit network that includes improved intercity passenger rail service, high-speed rail improvements would provide a backbone of fast, efficient, frequent, and reliable service between Eugene, Oregon and Vancouver, British Columbia. In combination with local transit services and emerging technologies that help make "last mile" connections, high-speed rail service would increase job access, link communities and major educational institutions, and connect potential customers to goods and services.

Discussion of Need for Funding Source

Today, Amtrak and the state of Oregon make an annual investment in maintaining passenger rail service and safety on the Union Pacific Railroad-owned freight rail tracks connecting Portland, Salem, and Eugene. This investment is critical to preserve passenger rail access and keep the corridor active into the future. Because moving upward on the high speed rail

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[1] Oregon Passenger Rail Project Revised Draft Final Purpose and Need Statement (January 8, 2013).
[2] Oregon Department of Transportation. Looking Forward: High Speed Rail Concept Vision Report (November 2014).

development requires an increase in ridership, near-term investments that make service more efficient and attractive are critical to the long-term vision for high speed rail.

In recent years, Oregon has made significant public investments in the rail system. However, these investments have been made using a variety of one-time funding sources with no dedicated revenue stream to support them. This leads to a lack of certainty about funding levels – an environment that is not conducive to effective long-term planning. Sustainable funding sources working in tandem with one-time funding sources, such as Oregon's multimodal *Connect*Oregon program, are required to maximize the utility of the rail system.

Once a funding source is in place, it can be used to leverage additional private and federal funding for rail projects. Examples are multimodal grants from Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) and the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) programs. Oregon's rail system has received some grants from these programs, but participation has been limited by lack of required state matching funds.[3]

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has indicated that they intend to continue to budget and award grants, including the potential for another round of TIGER Grants, aimed at supporting passenger and freight rail projects throughout the United States.

ODOT is finalizing an Oregon Passenger Rail Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the future of passenger rail in Oregon. With the preliminary analysis seen in this EIS, the project team is recommending Alternative 1 be carried forward as the Preferred Alternative in the Draft EIS. This includes making improvements to the existing line.

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[3] Oregon Rail Funding Research and Task Force (2011). Research Memorandum: Oregon Rail Needs and Potential Funding Sources.