

2015 Governor's Transportation Vision Panel

Discussion Outline on Oregon Passenger Rail Program

Oregon State Rail Plan vision is:

Oregon will have a safe, efficient, and commercially viable rail system that services its businesses, travelers and communities through private resources leveraged, as needed, by strategic public investments.

Goals, Objectives, and Policies:

Oregon's passenger rail and connecting public transportation system should offer frequent departures, through trains, extensive feeder bus service with convenient connections, and an outstanding travel information and passenger amenities program that can accommodate changes in transportation preferences and a per capita reduction in highway travel.

- Optimize ridership and revenue.
- Ensure on-time performance of 80 percent on a quarterly basis.
- Manage costs.
- Promote, preserve and enhance an efficient rail system that is accessible and integrated with Oregon's overall multimodal transportation system.
- Enhance transportation system reliability, capacity, frequency and travel times through investments that preserve and improve passenger rail assets and infrastructure.
- Plan, construct, operate, maintain, and coordinate the passenger rail system in Oregon with safety and security for all users and communities as a top priority.
- Increase opportunity to grow Oregon's economy.

Key Ingredients for successful passenger rail service.

- **Economic Sustainability:** This includes measures to increase the percentage of operating revenues from passenger fares.
- **Schedule Reliability:** Passengers cannot plan their trips and trip connections without knowing when the train will arrive and depart.
- **Responsiveness:** Responding to customer needs is critical to attracting and retaining passengers.
- **Intermodal Connectivity:** Connecting the service to other modes of transportation helps achieve all other goals, especially for isolated rural communities. If a passenger can safely arrive at a reliable time they can use the service with greater frequency, thus contributing to sustainability.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** This can include offering options to single occupancy vehicles, reducing emissions, and reducing and recycling food service items.

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- **Safety and Security:** Crew, passengers, and general public safety and security are critical for passenger rail to remain a viable transportation option in Oregon. If the service is not safe, passengers and crew will not use the service.
- **Frequency:** Without high frequency the utility of public transportation is greatly degraded. High frequency can be achieved through a mix of bus and passenger rail with rail frequency increasing as overall ridership builds.

Challenges

Oregon's investment in passenger rail contributes to resiliency and balance in the state transportation system. With over 70 percent of the state's population, the Willamette Valley will see significant growth over the next 30 years. Oregon's answer to future transportation needs will likely be a mix of strategies largely focused on using existing infrastructure more efficiently. Dramatically improved public transportation is part of that picture. Passenger rail is a form of public transportation with the very valuable characteristic of not being tied to highway traffic congestion. Particularly along the I-5 corridor, vehicles sit in congested traffic while passenger rail is unaffected. Today's passenger rail system creates an important foundation for any public transportation solution to the state's growing needs.

Oregon currently lacks enough dedicated, sustainable funds for the passenger rail investments needed in the state.

- Without additional funding, Oregon does not have revenue available to improve, maintain and operate Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service.
- ODOT pays for passenger rail through revenues generated by custom license plate fees, which the Oregon Legislature dedicated toward train service. In addition, ODOT uses money from the Transportation Operating Fund (TOF), which consists of fuels taxes generated from non-motor vehicle use, such as lawnmowers. However, these sources are not sufficient to pay the full cost of the trains.
- If the legislature does not continue additional funding, the Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service could end in Oregon, thus eliminating a key transportation option for Oregonians and our visitors. The number of single-occupancy vehicle trips on the I-5 corridor would increase adding to traffic congestion and the carbon footprint. If stopped, the cost of re-establishing Amtrak Cascades service is conservatively estimated at \$50 million. If the service is stopped at any time and for any reason, it will be prohibitively expensive to bring back to Oregon.

Through an effort that began in 2012, ODOT and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) are studying options for improved passenger rail service between Eugene-Springfield and Portland. Working with the governor-appointed Oregon Passenger Rail Leadership Council and following significant public involvement, two alternatives were identified for study in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). These alternatives include both construction of a new route along I-5 and improvements to the existing Union Pacific line.

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This environmental review will help ODOT and FRA make important decisions, including selecting the general rail alignment and communities where stations would be located. Based upon this environmental review several service characteristics have been determined, such as the number of daily trips and the technologies to be used - for example, whether the trains will be powered by electric or diesel-electric engines. Travel time objectives will also be determined. The project includes a public involvement strategy to ensure that the public is heard in the decision-making process. We expect the Oregon Passenger Rail Leadership Council to recommend a preferred alternative in December 2015. The public will then review the DEIS prior to the adoption of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Needs Assessment

In the 2015-2017 biennium ODOT received \$10.4 million in general fund to continue Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service. We expect to continue to need a similar level of investment to operate the Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service for the 2017-2019 biennium.