

Central Oregon Rail Plan

(Last updated May 30, 2008)

The purpose of the Central Oregon Rail Plan is to develop a regional plan which addresses various safety and congestion problems associated with *at-grade* railroad crossings, and opportunities to improve freight mobility. The planning effort covers the Tri-County area of Crook, Deschutes and Jefferson Counties.

The Central Oregon Area Commission on Transportation (COACT) is leading this effort. COACT is made up of local and state agencies and transportation stakeholders from the Tri-County area.

Background

Within Central Oregon there are two major rail lines. The longest is the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway with 101 mainline route miles in Deschutes and Jefferson Counties. The Union Pacific (UP) Railway also uses this railway through a haulage agreement with BNSF for local switching and for occasional reroute of trains that normally use their own rail line from Chemult to Eugene. Currently there is an average of 12 trains a day that use this route. This is expected to increase by 8 percent per year.

The second line is owned by the City of Prineville Railway with 19 miles of track that runs from Prineville to Prineville Junction (just north of Redmond, near the intersection of US 97 and the O'Neil Highway) where it connects with BNSF and UP. Currently there is an average of 1 train per day that uses this route for freight. This is not expected to increase over the next several years as the railway has excess freight capacity available on current trains. The line is also used for Friday, Saturday and Sunday dinner trains during the peak tourist season.

In addition there are a number of *spur* tracks off the BNSF and Prineville lines that access various businesses and properties.

Why this Plan is needed

Safety

At-grade crossings are dangerous for both motorists and railroad personnel. There are 45 public at-grade railway-roadway crossings on the BNSF mainline between La Pine and Madras. Nearly 50 percent of those are within the communities of Bend, La Pine, Madras and Redmond. The City of Prineville Railway has 22 public at-grade crossings with 33 percent of those within communities. There are also numerous private at-grade crossings. Over the past 10 years there have been 17 train/vehicle crashes resulting in 10 injuries and 4 deaths. With increased rail and vehicle traffic this is expected to substantially increase.

Increased congestion

Central Oregon grew by an incredible 64 percent from 2000 to 2006. As the population increases so does the demand for goods. Freight traffic is expected to increase at a similar pace, with many more trucks on the highway system each day.

As the population increases, so does the traffic. Many communities are having trouble working to manage the resulting increased congestion. To make matters worse, the increasing number of trains and the numerous at-grade railroad crossings add significantly to the road congestion and safety problems. Even short delays can back up traffic for blocks and disrupt traffic patterns throughout a community on any given day.

Economic vitality

As the area grows, along with the traffic, along with the demand for goods and services, so do the challenges of getting freight to market, resulting in a direct effect on the economy. While traffic bottlenecks and congestion worsen, the national railroad trend is towards larger customers and longer distance hauls with fewer stops. Small rail users, especially in rural areas, are finding it increasingly difficult to gain rail access. This is already affecting local industries. Less railroad access will have a compounding effect on the industrial and economic vitality of Central Oregon.

Every rail car can hold the equivalent of 3 to 3 ½ truckloads. Higher fuel costs, increased regulation and a shortage of drivers are causing trucking costs to spiral upward. The economies provided by rail are needed by local industries to connect and compete in regional, national and global marketplaces. Additional trucks will put tremendous wear on our already stressed highway, road and street systems.

Solutions only get more expensive and complicated with time

Now is the time to expand planning for the future. Land costs have increased significantly in the last few years and will likely continue to appreciate. Continued development will only narrow options and the costs to build grade-separated improvements will increase as a result.

What the Plan will do

Rail Crossing Issue

- Recommend a regional railroad crossing strategy and decision-making process.
- Prepare a regional prioritized list of crossing improvements, with cost and timing estimates. And for comparison purposes, prepare a preliminary feasibility analysis and cost estimate to construct a new rail alignment east of Central Oregon's urban areas.

Freight Mobility Issue

- Evaluate the feasibility of other long range rail planning work, such as analysis of rail yard and terminal capacity and semi-truck/railroad integration.
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a regional rail freight hub.
- Evaluate the feasibility for rail sidings or siding improvements in various jurisdictions.
- Evaluate the feasibility of handling containers by rail into and out of Central Oregon.

For both issues, COACT will seek public input, work toward gaining broad public support and present the Plan to elected officials for adoption.

Timeline

Summer 2008 Formal recommendation on relocation of the railroad east of Central Oregon urban areas to COACT.

End of 2008 Complete the Rail Plan.

How to become involved

Information about the plan will be posted on the internet at the following website:

http://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/HWY/REGION4/Central_Oregon_Rail_Plan/Central_Oregon_Rail_Plan.shtml

COACT meetings where the Plan will be discussed will be posted on this website. The following people may be contacted if you have questions or comments.

Contacts:

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