

MARCH 2010

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### *What is high-speed rail?*

The Federal Railroad Administration defines high-speed rail as train service that “is reasonably expected to reach speeds of at least 110 mph.”

### *Why don't we have high-speed rail in Oregon?*

To improve service to reach “high speed” of 110 mph requires significant capital improvement, totaling approximately \$2 billion. Until recently, federal funding for passenger rail didn't exist like it does for roads and highways. Since 1994, Oregon has consistently funded intercity passenger rail, which now includes two roundtrips per day between Portland and Eugene at speeds up to 79 mph. Now that federal funding has been identified, what seemed like an impossible task is now a potential opportunity.

### *How is Amtrak involved?*

Created by the federal government in 1971, Amtrak provides intercity passenger rail service on the privately owned freight railroad network. Oregon pays Amtrak to provide service between Eugene and Portland. This service, called the *Cascades*, stops at Eugene, Albany, Salem, Oregon City and Portland. In addition, Amtrak operates the *Coast Starlight* between Los Angeles and Seattle once a day. Although it also travels through Oregon and stops at the same station locations (except Oregon City) as the *Cascades*, Oregon does not pay for this service.

### *What is the PNWRC?*

The 466-mile Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor between Eugene, Oregon, and Vancouver, British Columbia, was designated by the Federal Railroad Administration in 1992 as a high-speed rail corridor. The PNWRC is one of ten federally designated high-speed rail corridors in the U.S.

### *What would be needed to get Oregon closer to high-speed rail?*

Oregon needs a comprehensive program to enhance passenger service frequency and speeds between Portland and Eugene as well as significant federal investment in the corridor. Specific projects to improve the state's existing rail system could allow passenger service to travel at a maximum 110 mph while also improving mobility and capacity for both freight and passenger trains.

### *Where will the stations be?*

Current passenger rail stations include Eugene, Albany, Salem, Oregon City and Portland. Future stations may or may not include these same cities, depending on study, research and public involvement findings.



### *What is the difference between high-speed rail, intercity passenger rail, commuter rail, and light rail?*

Intercity passenger rail runs from city to city and may be high speed, and it usually shares tracks with freight trains. Commuter rail is a specific service that caters to commuters by serving several cities and operating primarily at commuter hours. Light rail generally provides service within cities and suburbs, with frequent stops. It runs at slower speeds and does not share tracks with freight trains.

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## *How much will it cost?*

Depending on decisions such as alignment, environmental and community mitigation, engineering, etc., cost estimates range from \$1.9 to \$2.2 billion.

## *How can Oregon afford it?*

It would be difficult for Oregon to fund this project by itself. However, in 2009, unprecedented federal funding of \$8 billion was made available for state high speed rail programs. The Federal Railroad Administration's plan, Vision for High Speed Rail in America, says President Obama proposes to jumpstart the process with the \$8 billion down payment provided in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and a high-speed rail grant program of \$1 billion per year (proposed in his fiscal year 2010 budget). These first steps emphasize strategic investments that will yield tangible benefits to intercity rail infrastructure, equipment, performance, and intermodal connections over the next several years, while also creating a pipeline of projects to enable future corridor development. This federal commitment gives Oregon the chance to use its resources to leverage federal funding, an opportunity that has not been available in the past.

## *Does Oregon really benefit from having a strong passenger rail system?*

Yes! High-speed rail benefits everyone, even those who never ride a train, in many ways, including:

- It saves money by avoiding expenditure of billions in highway user costs, including travel time, incidents, vehicle operating costs and highway maintenance.
- It reduces carbon emissions in support of national and state policies and efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow climate change.
- It gives travelers options by enhancing intermodal connections to commuter rail, light rail, streetcar, bus service, park and ride locations, and bike/pedestrian facilities.

