

Q3 2023 Report to Legislature

Summary

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) co-funds the Amtrak Cascades intercity passenger rail service with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) with ridership and passenger satisfaction much improved. Figures for the third quarter of 2023 show increased ridership when compared to the second quarter of 2023 by 16 percent. Ridership for the third quarter surpassed 2019 pre-pandemic numbers and is approaching the 2013 record ridership numbers.

Key drivers of third quarter ridership numbers and on-time performance (OTP):

- increased ridership due to summer travel, higher gas prices, and lower ticket prices; and
- fewer delays attributed to Union Pacific.

OTP increased for northbound trains from 58 percent in the second quarter of 2023 to 68 percent in the third quarter of 2023. OTP increased for southbound trains from 57 percent in the second quarter of 2023 to 66 percent in the third quarter of 2023. Freight and passenger train meets and reduced speed orders are the primary drivers of late trains for the third quarter of 2023.

Status

Ridership for July through September 2023

- July, August, and September ridership in 2023 was up 16 percent over the second quarter of 2023.
- The pre-pandemic baseline for comparison purposes is 2019. Ridership for the third quarter of 2023 on the Oregon portion of the Amtrak Cascades route is 21 percent higher than the third quarter of 2019, continuing the upward trend of ridership recovery since the pandemic.
- Ridership for the third quarter of 2023 was the strongest since 2013 with all three months of the quarter seeing more than 10,000 riders each month.

On-Time Performance for July through September 2023

- OTP for northbound trains was 68 percent and southbound trains was 66 percent.
- OTP increased 10 percent from the second quarter to third quarter 2023.
- The longest delays this quarter were caused by:
 - freight and passenger train interference; and
 - slow order delays (speed reduction).
- Delays this quarter were caused by:
 - 63 percent - Host railroad
 - 27 percent - Amtrak
 - 10 percent- Unassignable (i.e., trespasser strikes, weather-related delays, and drawbridge operation)

Current Progress and Next Quarter Look Ahead

Survey of Amtrak Cascades Riders

In August 2023, ODOT conducted an online survey to collect feedback from Amtrak Cascades riders to understand changing trends in ridership, and consumer opinion on the performance of Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service within the State of Oregon. Nearly 17,000 people took the survey between September 1–15, 2023.

- 49 percent of respondents living in Oregon are over 55, with 31 percent 65 and over. This age group includes a higher proportion of frequent riders who, based on their responses, do not want to worry about driving, enjoy the experience of train travel, and are not in a hurry to reach their destination. They also have higher household incomes and are not as motivated by reduced fares or discounts.
- Across all age groups, the top motivating factors for taking the train are avoiding driving/parking hassles, the ability to work/relax on train, and the experience of train travel.
- Rider criticism centers around on-time performance and the limited number of traveling times (i.e., frequency).
- Riders stated that lack of first/last-mile car-free travel options to final destinations are a barrier to additional ridership.
- The survey showed there is ongoing interest in travel to Oregon and on Amtrak Cascades.

2024 Oregon State Rail Plan

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) requires an update to all state rail plans every four years. The Oregon State Rail Plan (OSRP) was last revised in 2020; therefore, ODOT has started the process for an update in 2024. The information included in the newly adopted [Oregon State Rail Plan-Implementation Plan](#) will be considered when updating the OSRP in 2024. Work on the update will begin in January 2024.

5th and 6th Round Trips between Seattle and Portland

ODOT, WSDOT, and Amtrak adjusted the train schedule to accommodate the 5th and 6th round trips between Portland to Seattle, pending approval by the host railroads. A start date has not been set. When the changes to the schedule become effective, ODOT will engage a broad communications plan to ensure the public is aware of the schedule change and alternative options.

The two additional daily roundtrips between Portland and Seattle will add significantly more capacity between the two busiest stations on the Amtrak Cascades route. Currently, trains on this segment of the corridor are often sold out, particularly on the weekends. By offering trains that leave earlier in the morning and later in the evening, day trips between the two cities will be more feasible. Both leisure and business travelers are expected to take advantage of these new travel options. Ridership projections indicate that with the additional of these new roundtrips, we should see substantial ridership increases on the Amtrak Cascades.

FRA Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study

The FRA is conducting an [Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study](#) to evaluate the restoration of daily intercity passenger rail service and the potential for

new Amtrak long-distance routes. FRA will report to Congress a list of prioritized long-distance routes and associated costs and funding opportunities. FRA expects to complete this work in the second half of 2024. ODOT, along with other western states, are participating in a series of four regional workshops with the FRA on this topic, including examining the restoration of the *Pioneer* route that served eastern Oregon until 1997. Two workshops were held in 2023 and the third and fourth will be scheduled in 2024.

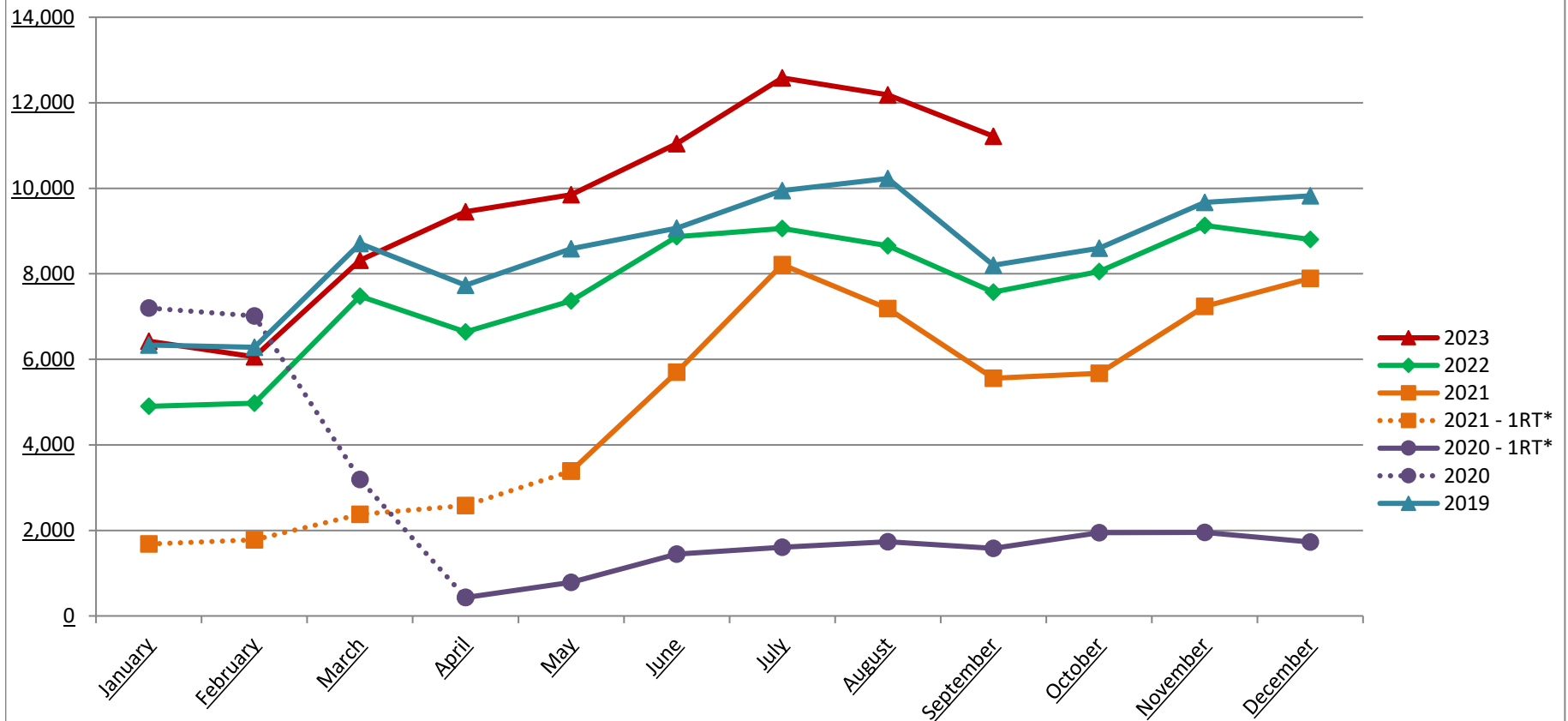
Cascadia High-Speed Rail Project

WSDOT is the lead for the Cascadia High Speed Rail project, formally called the Ultra High Speed Ground Transportation (UHSGT) project.

On March 9, 2023, WSDOT submitted a request for \$197.6M for the Cascadia High Speed Rail Project through the FRA [Federal State Partnership](#) (FSP) grant program. The funding will be used for pre-NEPA conceptual engineering and environmental review for high-speed rail between Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia (B.C.). ODOT provided a joint commitment letter for the funding request. Awards announcements are expected in December 2023.

ODOT is working in partnership with WSDOT and the B.C. Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to show readiness to receive and manage the FSP award. ODOT leadership serves on the Cascadia High Speed Rail Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) and ODOT staff serve on the Technical Advisory Committee. The committees met in Portland on September 18, 2023. The next PAC meeting is scheduled for December 4, 2023.

Amtrak Cascades Ridership in the Eugene – Portland Corridor Trains Operated Under Contract for the Oregon Department of Transportation

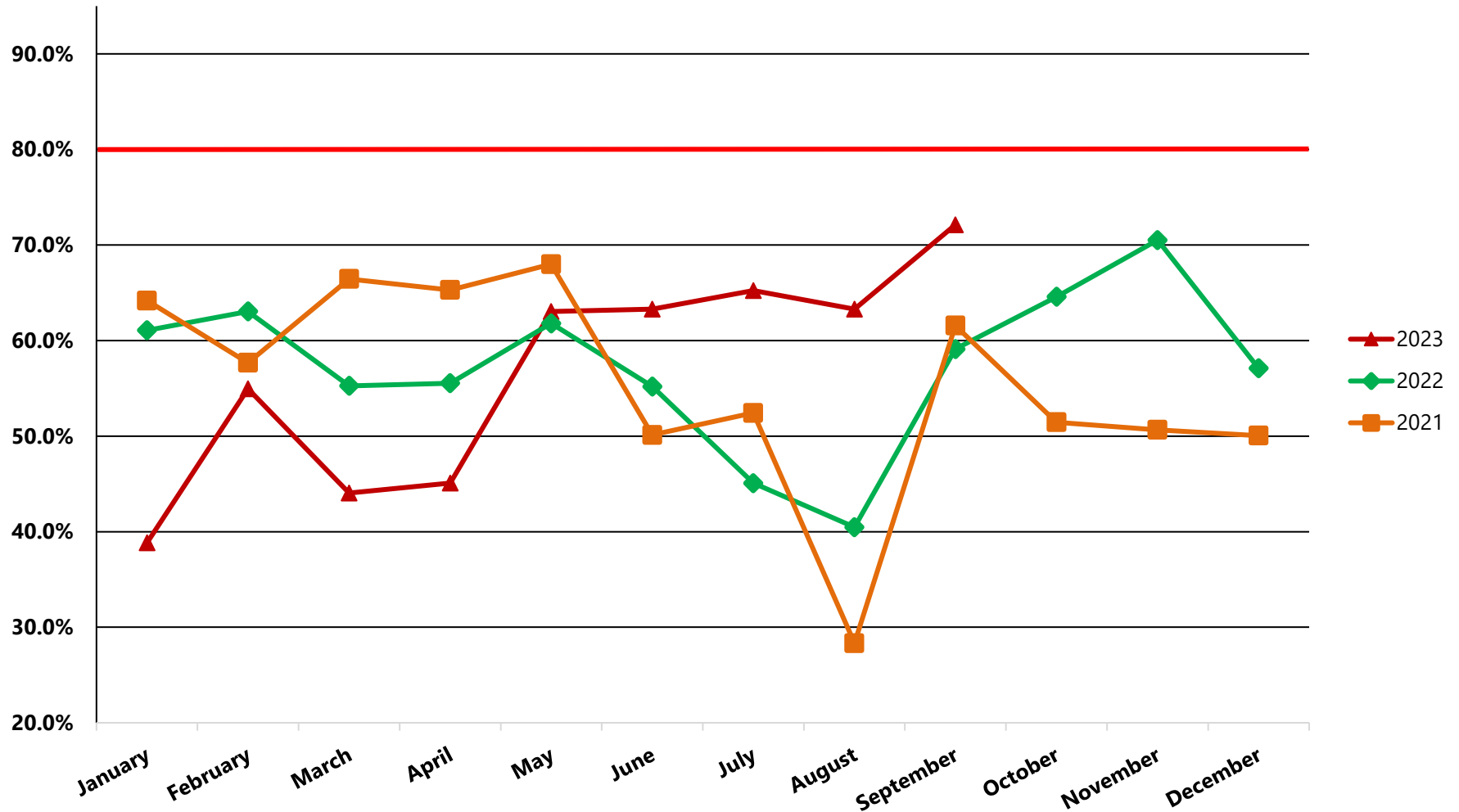


The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting decreases in demand led to the decision to reduce service to one round trip per day between Seattle and Eugene. Service was resumed to two daily round trips on May 24, 2021. The dotted lines above depict the timeframe when the service was reduced to one roundtrip daily.

*RT = Roundtrip PDX-EUG

Amtrak Cascades Customer On-Time Performance Eugene-Portland Corridor

Trains Operated Under Contract for the Oregon Department of Transportation



The data presented is based on the new federal standards for OTP. This new standard measures the timeliness of each individual passenger rather than the train and represents the percentage of customers who reached their stations in Oregon no later than 15 minutes after their published scheduled arrival time.