



# **2025 Report on Passenger Rail Agreements, Service Performance and Finance**

December, 2024

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## Executive Summary

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ODOT continually strives to improve passenger rail in Oregon through working with partners and Amtrak to implement the Oregon State Rail Plan and the Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan. This work involves development of agreements, efforts to improve the passenger experience, and ensuring adequate funding is available to operate the service and maintain and improve the infrastructure on the Portland to Eugene line.

ORS 824.400-824.430 requires the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to report on the status of intergovernmental agreements, and operational and financial performance of the Amtrak Cascades intercity passenger rail service to the Legislative Assembly before January 1 of each odd-numbered year.

Amtrak Cascades in Oregon has experienced record ridership numbers in the 2023-2024 biennium and has far surpassed pre-pandemic levels. Simplified fare structures, service enhancements, and increased frequency has helped to advance equity among marginalized populations and expand service to more riders who rely on Amtrak. An Amtrak Cascades rider survey in September 2023 indicated that first- and last-mile travel options to final destinations are a barrier to additional ridership. The survey also indicated that on-time performance (OTP) is a primary concern for Amtrak Cascades riders. As a result of this survey, first and last-mile travel options were added to the Amtrak Oregon website.

Customer OTP is based on the number of passengers that arrive at their detraining station no later than 15 minutes after the scheduled train arrival time, divided by the total number of passengers on that train. Amtrak owns and provides this data. ODOT is identifying and implementing recommendations through an agreement with Union Pacific Railroad (UP) to assess and prioritize needed infrastructure improvements. Computer modeling to identify these OTP improvements, as recommended by HB 2603, is expected to be completed in spring of 2025.

To maintain the current level of service in Oregon an estimated additional \$8.5M will be needed by 2026. To fully implement the SDP, increasing service from two to six round trips per day between Portland and Eugene an average of an additional \$140M per year would be needed through 2035. These capital investments would improve travel time and expand service. This includes the estimated full cost of the infrastructure improvements and ODOT would obtain grant funding to help offset some of these costs. State funding could provide match for federal grants to fund the capital improvements, expand service in Oregon and provide staffing for oversight and operations. The funding would drop to \$45M per year once the largest infrastructure investments have been made.

Passenger rail in Oregon is limited by current funding levels and limitations. A stable source of funding is needed to support the operation of Oregon's Amtrak Cascades service and make possible capital improvements to improve reliability, frequency and reduce travel times within

Oregon. ODOT is working with partners to advance projects through design to secure federal funding. Additional funding will be needed to maintain the current level of service and pursue high-priority projects and programs to improve service. Of particular importance is creation of a state funding mechanism to provide match for leveraging federal capital improvement grants.

# Introduction

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ORS 824.420 authorizes the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to enter into agreements with the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (BCMoTI) to manage the development and operation of passenger rail services within the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor (Corridor) between Eugene, Oregon and Vancouver, British Columbia (B.C.). Pursuant to this law, the agreements may be to:

- Develop a plan to document the shared vision, goals, and objectives for passenger rail service within the Corridor;
- Develop a plan to achieve performance goals, manage fleet assets, share costs, prioritize investments, and resolve interagency disputes;
- Propose funding options to the respective legislative bodies to support the operation of passenger trains within the Corridor;
- Develop a stakeholder outreach program;
- Oversee operations and marketing of daily passenger rail service in the Corridor; and
- Coordinate state rail plans.

ORS 824.430 requires ODOT provide a status report to the Legislative Assembly before January 1 of each odd-numbered year on the following:

1. The status of agreements with WSDOT and BCMoTI regarding the Corridor;
2. The performance of passenger rail service within the Corridor; and
3. The financial status of the Corridor and financial needs for passenger rail service within the Corridor.

The purpose of this report is to meet the ORS 824.430 requirement.

## Agreements Status

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Oregon and Washington have a long history of collaboration, contributing to the success of passenger rail service on the Corridor. Oregon and Washington have planned, studied, and operated a coordinated, state-sponsored passenger rail service since 1994. The shared vision is to continue operating the service as a fully integrated passenger rail system. Oregon and Washington will work to increase ridership and revenue and to retain and enhance intercity passenger rail service as a competitive transportation choice.

Since WSDOT and Amtrak retired the Talgo Series 6 trainsets in 2020, the fleet has consisted of the ODOT-owned Talgo Series 8 trainsets and Non-Powered Control Units (NPCUs), WSDOT-owned Charger locomotives, and Amtrak-owned equipment leased to the states.

Amtrak is procuring new Airo trainsets for intercity use and are anticipated begin revenue service for the Amtrak Cascades in 2026. Amtrak will provide eight trainsets for use in the corridor; however, equipment, parts and maintenance costs are still being negotiated. ODOT continues to work on the future disposition of the state-owned Talgo Series 8 trainsets. As new Airos progress into Amtrak Cascades' revenue service, ODOT's current equipment fleet will be phased out of service to have a more cost-effective and efficiently operated fleet.

The Airo trainsets are being manufactured by Siemens in Sacramento, California. Each trainset will consist of six semi-permanently coupled cars with 250 coach seats, 49 business class seats, and a food and beverage café in one car.

ODOT and WSDOT have separate operating agreements with Amtrak with similar and complimentary terms and conditions. Since the 2015-2016 ODOT-Amtrak Operating Agreement, all agreements include a dispute resolution process.

The pandemic caused unanticipated revenue, cost, operational and service impacts to both states. It also added uncertainty to equipment costs and availability and highlighted new risks and gaps in existing agreement that all states have with Amtrak, known as the Passenger Rail Improvement and Investment Act (PRIIA) Section 209 policy. The State-Amtrak Intercity Passenger Rail Committee (SAIRPC) is a multi-agency body whose members include 20 agencies in 17 states, Amtrak, and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA). ODOT is an active member of this group and worked with SAIRPC to agree upon changes to the PRIIA 209 policy and Amtrak operating agreements to reflect a common approach across the states to help reduce and control rising and unpredictable costs. These modifications were approved in October of 2024 with minor adjustments continuing to take place and will likely result in higher costs. These changes have been incorporated into the 2024 operating agreements.

# Service Performance

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## *Ridership*

Amtrak Cascades in Oregon has experienced record high ridership numbers in the 2023-2024 biennium and has far surpassed pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, near record high ridership occurred in the summer and continued into the last three months of that year. Ridership continued to increase throughout 2024. (see Figure 1)

ODOT continuously monitors and evaluates ridership on every Amtrak Cascades train to determine which trains attract the most passengers. ODOT and WSDOT coordinate on the analyses of ridership data to consider train fare and schedule adjustments that are intended to help maximize ridership.

In fall 2023, Amtrak Cascades introduced a simplified fare structure with more flexible and affordable options and Amtrak provides a monthly commercial performance update to ensure revenue is not negatively impacted. With the new fares, customers are now able to modify their booking without penalty if they need to change their trip or receive full refunds if they need to cancel their trip. These improvements build on other recent pricing enhancements Amtrak has done to make travel more affordable. This includes a children's discount so that all children between 2 and 12 can travel for 50% off with an accompanying adult, whereas previously, this policy was limited to one child discount per adult fare. Additionally, passenger discounts, such as senior and military, have been expanded to apply to all fares, including sales. Share fares have also been enhanced, and 3-8 people traveling together may receive discounts ranging from 15 to 60%. Amtrak Guest Reward members are now able to purchase tickets with points on more fare types. This has helped to advance equity by funding equitable mobility and improving prices for low-income and historically marginalized populations and ensuring a greater number of Oregonians benefit from transportation services.

In December 2023, a schedule adjustment replaced train 500 that departed Eugene at 5:30 AM with train 504 which departs Eugene at 7:45 AM. Train 504 currently has the best ridership in Oregon. POINT Bus service is used to cover the earlier travel time.

In addition to fare and service enhancements, train frequency has resumed to full service, with six daily roundtrips between Portland and Seattle, two daily roundtrips between Eugene and Portland, and two daily roundtrips between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C. ODOT funds POINT Bus to connect riders from Eugene to Portland for the additional round trips each day.

Gasoline prices affect train ridership. A rise in fuel prices typically correlates with an increase in ridership. This trend was particularly apparent in 2012-2013 and 2023-2024, when gas prices were relatively high and ridership increased.

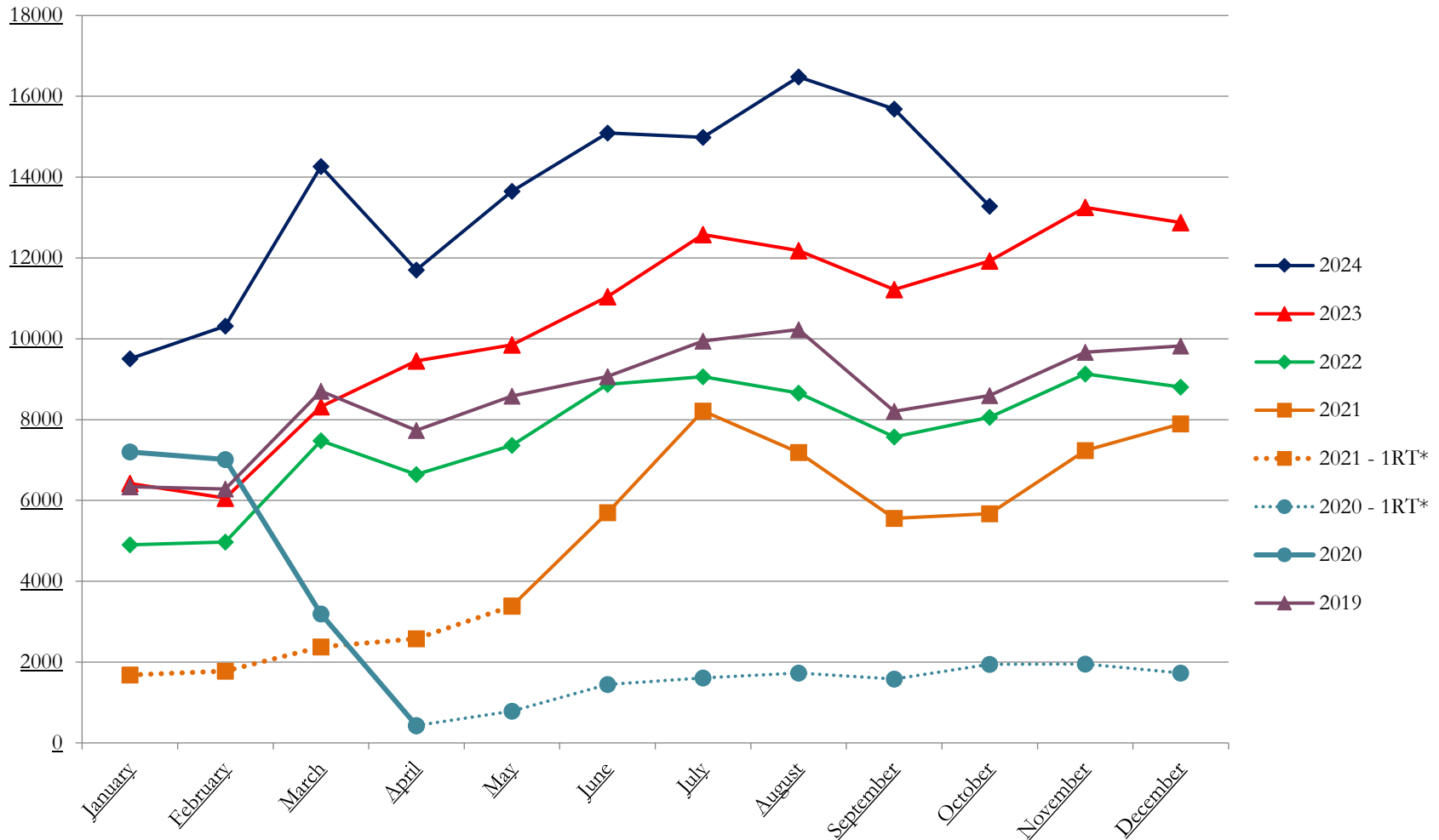
### *Communications and Outreach*

While increases in ridership are not necessarily attributed to heightened ad campaigns, ODOT continues to raise awareness about Amtrak Cascades through marketing efforts and the Amtrak Oregon website. Amtrak Cascades leveraged several communications and outreach strategies to engage the public, increasing mobility and accessibility. The most recent campaign report shows near record visitors to the website in June 2024 with over 30,000 people starting the booking process, which is a 450% increase since March 2022, a month after the website was first launched. Amtrak Cascades was a sponsor for the 2023 and 2024 Portland Rose Festival and included messaging for Amtrak's Mother's Day and Memorial Day travel on Facebook and the Amtrak Oregon website. ODOT and WSDOT have participated in Amtrak's seasonal sales and alternate providing Amtrak Cascades posts for Facebook.

To understand factors driving the substantial post-pandemic Cascades ridership increase within Oregon, ODOT conducted an online survey in September 2023 to collect feedback from Oregon riders and gain insight into consumer opinion on the performance of Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service. Nearly 17,000 people took the survey between September 1–15, 2023. Results of the survey indicated that motivating factors for taking the train are avoiding driving and parking hassles, the ability to work and relax on the train, and the experience of train travel. Riders stated that areas for improvement include on-time performance and frequency and that lack of first- and last-mile car-free travel options to final destinations are a barrier to additional ridership. As a result of this survey, first and last-mile travel options were added to the Amtrak Oregon website. These efforts, paired with prioritization of active transportation and innovative mobility projects, have helped to advance equity for populations which rely on transit.



### Figure 1. 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**

### *On-time Performance (OTP)*

On-time performance (OTP) measures a system's success at arriving at its destination according to the published schedule. This metric is important to passengers, because it indicates the reliability of Amtrak getting them where they need to go, at the time they expect to be there. Poor OTP is inconvenient and dissuades potential riders from using Amtrak Cascades, leading to greater greenhouse emissions if they choose to drive or decreased mobility if they have no alternative transportation modes. ODOT tracks these metrics to monitor how customers are being affected and look for ways to implement service improvements to improve on-time performance.

Customer OTP is based on the number of passengers that arrive at their detraining point no later than 15 minutes after the scheduled arrival time, divided by the total number of passengers on that train. This standard reflects what passengers experience at every station served by a train.

Amtrak performs a monthly survey of random passengers on the Amtrak Cascades Service and compiles a report of the customer satisfaction in various categories. Amtrak then shares this information with the states. The OTP satisfaction scores are consistently the lowest which aligns with results from surveys that have been done by ODOT and WSDOT over the years. The Amtrak OTP low satisfaction results also align with ODOT's September 2023 survey, which indicated that on-time performance OTP was a primary concern for Oregon Amtrak Cascades riders. In both 2023 and 2024, the longest delays were caused by freight and passenger train interference and slow order delays (speed reduction).

With unreliable OTP, many current and prospective Cascades passengers may choose more reliable alternative means of transportation. Efforts to improve OTP have been noted in both the Oregon Passenger Rail Final Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (FEIS/ROD), and in the Amtrak Cascades Preliminary Service Development Plan (SDP).

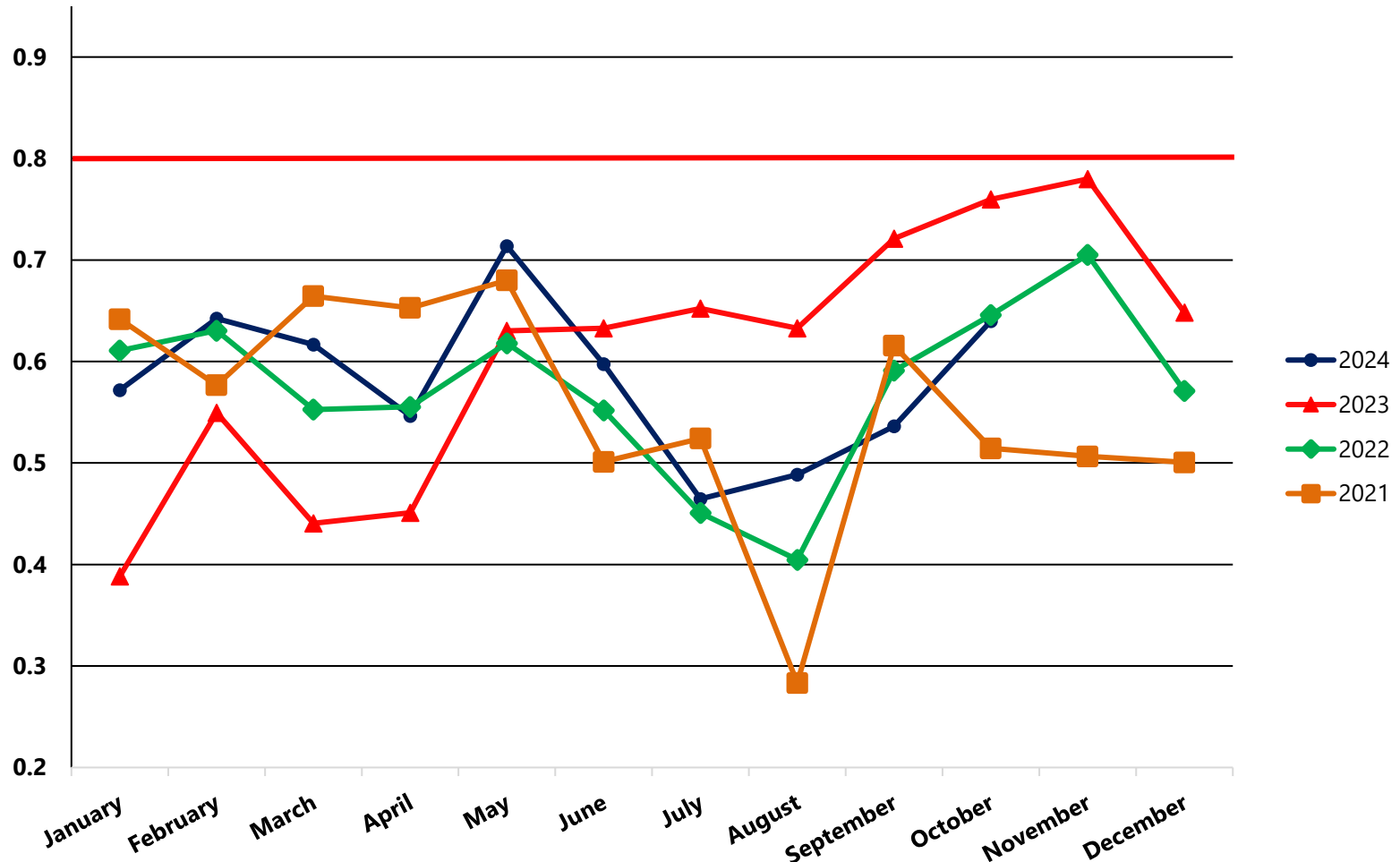
SDP strategies to improve OTP include adding passenger capacity and continuous, careful interagency coordination and stewardship between ODOT, WSDOT, Amtrak, UP, BNSF, and Sound Transit (in Washington). Additionally, the FEIS/ROD discusses OTP improvements through accommodating higher train speeds to reduce rail trip times and improving connections with regional public transit services. These strategies continue to build on current work addressing customer concerns regarding first- and last-mile connections and OTP, improving service reliability and providing riders with an efficient, safe, equitable, and affordable alternative to highway, bus, and air travel.

The FRA designed the new metrics and standards to cooperatively reinvent the relationship between Amtrak and its host railroads for improving performance of intercity passenger trains while providing a mechanism for addressing under-performing services.

In 2019, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill (HB) 2603 directing ODOT to study and identify root causes for passenger train delays in Oregon due to interference by freight and other passenger trains. The study investigated passenger train delays and recommended steps to improve reporting and minimize delay incidents. ODOT has begun implementing the recommendations by working with UP to conduct computer modeling. This modeling assesses and prioritizes needed infrastructure improvements to increase OTP and capacity. ODOT will need state or federal funding to build the projects identified. Modeling is expected to be complete in spring of 2025. The ODOT team also works with Amtrak and UP to ensure OTP reporting and delay details are accurate as outlined in the HB 2603 study. The federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) formed a Passenger Rail Advisory Committee (PRAC) in November 2023. The purpose of the PRAC is to provide advice and guidance to the STB on passenger rail issues to help the Board better fulfill its statutory responsibilities in overseeing certain aspects of passenger rail service including OTP.

Figure 2 displays the monthly Customer OTP for all Amtrak Cascades trains operating in the Oregon portion of the route from January 2023 through October 2024. These numbers represent the percentage of passengers that reached their detraining point no later than 15 minutes after their published scheduled arrival time.

**Figure 2. 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.

## Funding Needs and Potential Sources

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To maintain the current level of service in Oregon an estimated additional \$8.5M will be needed by 2026. ODOT expects increased costs related to the new Amtrak Airo equipment and related increased operational costs. Investments in passenger rail systems are also necessary to maintain existing infrastructure in a state of good repair. Capital and operating investments are critical to maintain current service levels and improve reliability and travel times within Oregon.

To fully implement the SDP, increasing service from two to six round trips per day between Portland and Eugene an average of an additional \$140M per year would be needed through 2035. These capital investments would improve travel time and expand service. This includes the estimated full cost of the infrastructure improvements and ODOT would obtain grant funding to help offset some of these costs. State funding could provide match for federal grants to fund the capital improvements, expand service in Oregon and provide staffing for oversight and operations. The funding would drop to \$45M per year once the largest infrastructure investments have been made.

In 2026 Amtrak will receive new Airo equipment that will replace the current Amtrak Cascades equipment. Many costs associated with the new equipment are unknown and estimates are incorporated into the cost to operate the service beginning 2026, raising those costs from \$16.1 M to \$21.8 M total. As round trips go from two to four to six, operating costs will increase from \$21.8 M to \$55.3 M total. The incremental increases in costs are due to increased expenses incurred because of additional operating the Amtrak Cascades service.

Once the new Airo equipment is in service, the existing Oregon Talgo trainsets will need to be rehomed. These trainsets were purchased with Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds and could require FTA repayment based on the remaining prorated value of \$15 M of remaining useful life at that time.

Investments and improvements in infrastructure are required for expansion of passenger rail in Oregon. Current funding in Oregon for passenger rail is from state sources. State funding sources include the Transportation Operating Fund (TOF), General Fund, and custom license plate revenue. TOF revenues are derived from gas taxes collected on fuel sold for non-road use, such as lawnmowers, for which purchasers do not request a refund. TOF serves as a flexible funding source that can be used for projects or directives that are ineligible for highway or federal funds.

The FRA has competitive grants available for passenger and freight rail projects. These grants require a 20% match and are for planning funds to get projects to 30% design, or construction for projects that are at 30% design/shovel-worthy. ODOT has pursued federal funding through multiple FRA grant programs that include the following:

- **Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program (CRISI)**

- ODOT submitted a CRISI planning grant application in May 2024 but was not successful.
- ODOT recently completed the Peninsula Junction project that was funded by a CRISI grant. This project will increase the train speed from 10 MPH to 25 MPH.
- **Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP)**
  - The Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) was released in early October 2024. Projects must be ready for final design or construction.
  - The ODOT Rail Team reviewed several projects . All were previously funded by FRA to complete preliminary engineering and obtain FRA environmental approvals, and are included in Oregon’s Service Development Plan and the Rail Needs Inventory in the Oregon State Rail Plan – Implementation Plan. ODOT will apply for:
    1. **Eugene Layover Siding**
      - Construct siding at Eugene’s station for Oregon’s Amtrak Cascades trains to detrain and entrain passengers, and for layover between runs.
      - A layover at the depot would improve on-time reliability of our service by removing the risk of train interference when moving from the Union Pacific’s Eugene Yard to the depot preparatory to departure.
      - Construction of a new power-operated switch and signals for accessing the new siding, availability of 480-volt standby electricity to allow locomotive shutdown lowering carbon emissions.
      - Modernization of the station platform to ADA requirements adjacent to the siding.
      - **Support** - Union Pacific, Amtrak, and the City of Eugene.
      - **Grant Request and Match** - \$15 million; \$3 million match.
    2. **Willbridge Crossovers:**
      - Willbridge is 4.3 miles north of Portland Union Station where trains switch between the two mainlines.
      - Project will allow train speed to increase from 10 MPH to 35 MPH, supporting schedule reliability for passenger and freight trains entering and leaving northwest Portland freight yards.
      - **Support** – BNSF Railway, Amtrak, Union Pacific, Portland & Western
      - **Grant Request and Match** - \$12 million; \$2.4 million match.
- **Restoration and Enhancement Grants Program**
  - Provides funding assistance for initiating, restoring, or enhancing intercity passenger rail transportation operations.
- **Railroad Crossing Elimination Grant Program**
  - ODOT is developing a ranking list of potential projects as part of the State Rail Plan Update
- **Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID)**

- The Amtrak Cascades are part of CID Program which accelerates funding for corridor improvement projects for state-supported passenger rail services.

Passenger rail in Oregon is limited by current funding levels and limitations. It has no dedicated source of funding to ensure state contributions are available to meet the match requirement for the CID Program and other federal grant opportunities.

## Oregon Passenger Rail Investments

ODOT has been instrumental in facilitating capital investments in railroad infrastructure that will benefit movement of passengers and freight in Oregon. UP owns the line and ODOT is the applicant for federal grants and manages the projects with UP's input and support. Table 1 provides information on current projects and the expected benefits.

**Table 1. Investments in Passenger Rail in Oregon**

Project Name	Project Description	Project Cost	Funding Source	Benefit
North Portland Junction	Upgrade UP junction switch and realign UP mainline approach to North Portland Junction to eliminate 10 mph speed restriction and permit 25 mph operation entering and leaving BNSF mainline.	\$8,286,624 \$3,551,410	Connect Oregon UP	The North Portland and Peninsula Junction projects, separated by less than one mile, together provide a safe, consistent and more fluid movement through both junctions as trains merge onto and off the BNSF mainline. Now completed, these projects will provide improvements in speed and reducing delay and congestion in the corridor.
Peninsula Junction	Upgrade two UP junction switches and realign a curve to permit 25 mph through Peninsula Junction in support of similar investments to increase speed through North Portland Junction.	\$242,290 \$650,000 \$427,148	State Amtrak Federal	



Project Name	Project Description	Project Cost	Funding Source	Benefit
Oregon State Rail Plan Implementation Plan	Develop ODOT's first implementation plan for the 2020 State Rail Plan, which will carry over to subsequent State Rail Plans.	\$149,807	State	Established a transparent process to implement state policies and efficiently prioritize public investments in transportation projects ensuring a safe, efficient and reliable rail network for Oregon residents and businesses.
Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan - Implementation Plan (SDP-IP)	Develop a phased implementation plan for the Oregon Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan	\$490,632 \$427,148	Connect Oregon Federal	Complete a SDP-IP for the Eugene to Portland portion of the Amtrak Cascades Corridor. Work will include modeling to determine the type and location of capacity investments for improving reliability and increasing frequency. This work is coordinated with the WSDOT SDP.
Oregon State Rail Plan	Creation of the 2024 State Rail Plan is underway. Rail plans are federally required to be updated every four years.	\$1,129,374	State	Review and update the 2020 State Rail Plan adding new information, policies and developments that have occurred since 2020.

# The Future of Passenger Rail in Oregon

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Several high-priority efforts are underway to improve passenger and freight rail in Oregon. Improvements to passenger rail will enhance the customer experience, namely by increasing the reliability of the service to get people where they want to go on time and in comfort.

## **Oregon Cascades Service Development Plan Implementation**

The Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan (SDP) was adopted by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) in 2021. The SDP lays out the overall scope and approach for improvement and expansion of intercity passenger service between Eugene and Portland over the next 20 years. To implement the SDP, corridor modeling with UP and FRA must be completed. This will produce a prioritized list of capital infrastructure projects needed to improve the line for both passenger and freight rail. The modeling is expected to be completed in 2025. The state is responsible for implementing the SDP by leveraging federal grants for infrastructure additions and improvements.

Integral to SDP implementation is ODOT's entry into the CID Program, along with the WSDOT. ODOT and WSDOT will continue to coordinate to ensure their SDPs are in alignment and complement each other to address the full Amtrak Cascades corridor. The Cascades Corridor was admitted into the CID Program on Dec. 8, 2023.

## **Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID)**

The CID Program is a comprehensive intercity passenger rail planning and development program that will help guide intercity passenger rail development throughout the country and create a pipeline of intercity passenger rail projects ready for implementation. The program is divided into three steps. Step 1 is for scoping an SDP; Step 2 is to prepare or update an SDP; and Step 3 covers the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/preliminary engineering for capital projects where the sponsor completes environmental review in coordination with FRA.

Since the Cascades Corridor was admitted into the CID Program in December 2023, Oregon and Washington have worked with FRA to advance their respective portions of the corridor through the program. FRA supports Oregon quickly attaining Step 3 status since the SDP that FRA approved in 2021 meets the CID Program criteria for Step 1 and Step 2. Entry into Step 3 will put the projects identified in the modeling work into the project pipeline for federal funding.

Modeling must be completed and readiness criteria satisfied before ODOT can advance to Step 3 of the CID program. The current modeling being conducted in coordination with UP, with FRA review and approval, is affirming the previous modeling done for the SDP projects (Figure 6-2 below). Once modeling is completed, projects will be prioritized in consultation with UP and FRA.

After projects have been prioritized, ODOT will work collaboratively to demonstrate the prioritized projects meet the following readiness criteria to enter Step 3 of the CID program:

- Corridor sponsor has support of participant stakeholder, such as leadership, host railroads, and funding partners.
- Governance structure and institutional capacity exist to implement and maintain on-going service.
  - All parties are active participants in structure and corridor sponsor demonstrated adequate institutions capacity exists to advance the corridor into the project development phase.
- Funding is identified for implementation and on-going operations support.
  - ODOT will need to provide FRA with a description of the terms and types of funding expected to be committed and the projected timeframe for commitment.
- There is a defined standalone benefit for the Corridor.

Once projects reach Step 3, they will be eligible for a finite pool of \$250 million in federal funds. This funding is available on a first-come, first-serve basis, so entering Step 3 as quickly as possible will improve ODOT's chances of securing and leveraging these funds. Advancing prioritized projects through ongoing, constructive collaboration with UP, is the best way to deliver critical improvements along the Portland-Eugene corridor that will improve OTP.

### **Portland Union Station**

Union Station is owned by Prosper Portland, the city's economic development office. ODOT understands the importance and value of the station. ODOT is actively working with Prosper Portland to find a way to advance the design and provide a better cost estimate for future planning for the seismic rehabilitation of the 128-year-old station and modernize the public spaces while redesigning depot platforms to meet ADA requirements.

Prosper Portland is requesting that ODOT take the lead on this project. ODOT considered this project for the recent FSP grant applications. However, the lack of \$4M in match funds made this \$20M proposed project not viable.

The Union Station project is critical connection for the Amtrak Cascades service as well as two of Amtrak's long-distance services. ODOT plans to apply for funding through Step 3 of the CID Program (see below for more information).

### **2024 Oregon State Rail Plan Update**

The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) requires state rail plans be updated every four years. The Oregon State Rail Plan (OSRP) was last revised in 2020, and the 2024 update is in progress. This process will include consideration of the newly adopted Oregon State Rail Plan-Implementation Plan. The OSRP will also identify highway-rail grade crossing (intersections where a highway crosses a railroad at-grade) and other crossing safety improvement projects that may qualify for federal grant funding.

The Oregon State Rail Plan – Implementation Plan (OSRP-IP) is used to enact state policies and efficiently prioritize and fund rail transportation projects. The OSRP-IP is a living, changing process that engages with ODOT policies, plans and goals; stakeholders in the rail space; and the Rail Needs Inventory (RNI), which aims to be a comprehensive list of rail projects needed in the state. The OSRP-IP develops a decision framework for refining and prioritizing RNI projects; this decision framework is referred to in this document as the “RNI Evaluation Tool.”

The OSRP-IP RNI Evaluation Tool is intentionally designed to allow users to rank and filter projects by adjusting the weighting of various criteria. This enables ODOT to determine which projects best compete for available sources of state and federal funding.

### **Cascadia High-Speed Rail (HSR) Program**

The Cascadia High-Speed Rail program will link Vancouver, British Columbia, Seattle, and Portland with high-speed rail trains that could travel up to 250 mph and have one-hour travel times between each city. This program is being planned concurrently with the Amtrak Cascades planning work to have a coordinated and integrated look at the rail needs in the region.

The program was admitted into the FRA CID Program in 2023. WSDOT continues to work with FRA to advance the project through the CID Program into Step 2 with support from the jurisdictional partners ODOT, Metro, and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure. ODOT has been involved and consulted since the project’s inception in 2016.

Step 2 will involve the development of an SDP. This phase will engage partners and communities along the corridor and will answer the following:

- What is the vision for a high-speed corridor given projected regional growth?
- What is the market and ridership potential?
- What environmental opportunities and concerns need to be considered?
- What are the potential route options?
- At a high level, what are the economic and governance considerations for future phases?

Development of the SDP is planned to be complete in 2028 with the program moving into Step 3, which is project-level NEPA and preliminary engineering.

ODOT studied high-speed rail from Portland to Eugene in 2014 independent of the Washington-led effort. This study addressed the potential for HSR in the Willamette Valley, and the comparative corridors conditions relative to other HSR markets in and beyond the U.S. The 2014 report also detailed the steps and concept thresholds necessary to reach Cascades’ full potential and establish possible foundations for HSR in the Willamette Valley. ODOT is updating the findings to 2024 numbers using domestic comparative corridors, with the aim of providing a recommendation as to whether additional studies are warranted for extension of HSR to Eugene.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated by ODOT's history of supporting Amtrak intercity passenger rail service, and its substantial investments in rail line and station improvements along the corridor, the State of Oregon is committed to realizing and sustaining the benefits of passenger rail in Oregon. Improvement of passenger rail service will provide environmental, economic and transportation benefits for generations to come, but a sustained and adequate funding source are crucial to this effort.