

Number of state-supported rail passengers

Our strategy

ODOT's strategy for increasing passenger rail ridership includes completing the Passenger Rail Corridor Investment Plan and related federal environmental reviews. This plan identifies infrastructure improvements, equipment needs, and a service development plan that would improve on-time reliability and increase the frequency of passenger rail service in Oregon. The Record of Decision from the Federal Railroad Administration is projected for late 2020 and at that time ODOT will be more competitive for federal funds to improve the service. When fully implemented in the 2035 timeframe, ridership and reliability are projected to increase and improve.

About the target

Historically, our goals targeted year-over-year increase in passengers riding Amtrak Cascades trains and Cascades POINT buses. Intercity Cascades POINT bus ridership is included in this measure because it supplements the Cascades network through connections with trains operating north of Portland.

How we are doing and how we compare

Ridership was expected to grow in 2017 with the addition of two new trains between Seattle and Portland, bringing the total to six

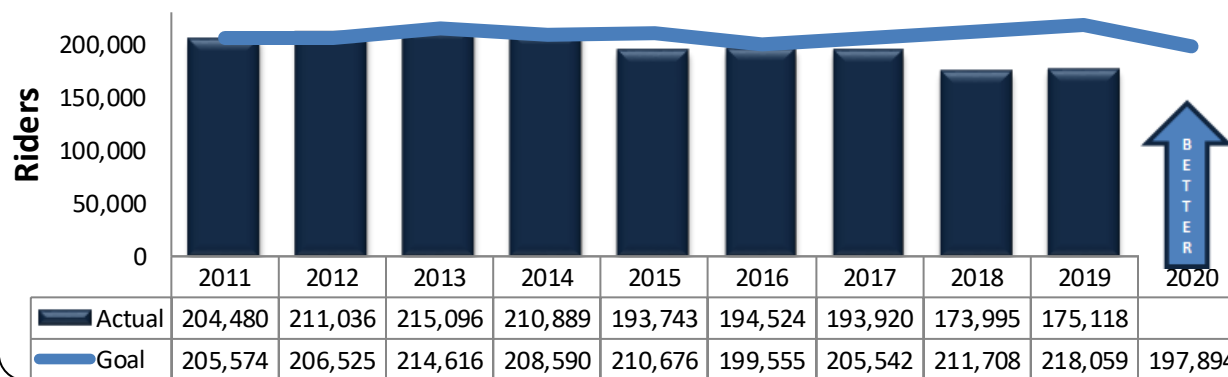
trains per day each way and establishing a needed through connection with Oregon's morning train south from Portland. Goals for 2017 through 2019 were based on the 2016 goal with 3% increases per year.

However, on the first day of service, one of the trains derailed on the new Point Defiance Bypass segment near DuPont, Washington resulting in several passenger deaths and injuries. The derailment had a chilling effect on Amtrak Cascades ridership for much of the following year. Late in 2018, ridership began to show signs of recovery with ridership ending the year at 173,995 and subsequently improving to 175,118 in 2019.

As a result, our 2020 goal was reduced and keyed on 2017 actuals of 193,920 plus 2.5%. Our legislatively approved goal for 2021 is 201,852.

More recently, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has led to more than a 95% decline in ridership since mid-March 2020. Given this situation, attaining our 2020 and 2021 goals may be improbable. Therefore, we are requesting legislative approval to base our 2022 goal on the actual ridership for 2019 plus 1% resulting in a target of 176,869.

Number of rail service passengers



Passenger rail ridership, cont.

2023's goal adds 1% to 2022 and results in 178,638.

Factors affecting results and what we need to do

Oregon passenger ridership hit an interim peak in 2013, and has remained below this record for several reasons. In 2014, ODOT implemented a schedule change that despite modeling predicting ridership increases, did not lead to ridership gains for several reasons: a competing private bus service entered the market, gas prices dropped, and on-time performance dropped due to increased passenger and freight train interference.

In the years since the 2014 schedule change, ODOT modified weekend train schedules to attract more leisure travelers, while weekday schedules are business-oriented. Poor on-time performance, often due to seasonal track maintenance, can result in schedule unreliability, which discourages time-sensitive users. ODOT moved to improve ridership by aligning all Oregon schedules as connections with trains from Washington beginning December 18, 2017 when two round-trips were added between Portland and Seattle.

However, the expanded service was tragically curtailed after the previously mentioned derailment in Washington.

Despite this major setback, ODOT's partner, the Washington State Department of Transportation remains committed to expanding the number of daily round-trips between Seattle and Portland from four to six, and rerouting the service over the Point Defiance Bypass, which will save 10 minutes of travel time. Amtrak is working to acquire trainsets needed for operating the added frequencies and the new service is tentatively to begin in the fall of 2020. Meanwhile, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Amtrak Cascades service was cut in March and April of 2020, to one train per day each way between Eugene and Seattle. Significant reductions in ODOT's Cascades POINT service also were effected as travel demand declined by more than 95%.

Oregon's Passenger Rail Program closely tracks ridership on a per-train basis to determine which trains and, consequently, which time slots carry the most passengers. This information helps to fine tune our train schedules in concert with our Washington state partners for optimal ridership.

About the data

The reporting cycle is calendar year. The data are provided by Amtrak, Oregon's passenger rail service provider, and represent the total number of rail passengers each year. As the population of Oregon grows and congestion worsens in the Willamette Valley and Portland

metropolitan area, the popularity of the train as a travel alternative is expected to grow significantly.

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Data source

ODOT Public Transportation Division