

Rail Advisory Committee (RAC)

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 10:52 a.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attendees, *RAC Members*

Bruce Carswell, Chair

Gary Cardwell

Aaron Hunt

Carmen Merlo

Johan Hellman

Chase Kitchen

Ross Lane

Toby Van Altvorst

Introductions and Committee Business

- Quorum confirmed

Action Item: Check status of Carmen Merlo membership.

Legislative Update: Karyn Criswell and Bruce Carswell

- **STATE**
 - SB 16-1 – signed by Governor Kotek on 05/08/2023: creates additional provisions to ORS 824.016 relating to the State Rail Rehabilitation Fund. May require appropriation.
 - HB3406 – Shortline Tax Credit – moving out of joint tax expenditures committee.
 - ODOT budget bills passed House and moved into Senate, should be wrapped by Sunday June 25th at midnight.
- **FEDERAL**
 - Safety bills sponsored by Senators Vance and Brown do not yet have 60 votes needed to bring to the Senate floor.
 - Truck size, weight and length: Would create a 10-year pilot program - weight of 92-93k. Would allow states that opted in to run heavier trucks to allow for the increased weight of electric trucks. The concern is that it doesn't come with increased funding for maintenance or heavier tax for heavier trucks. Some state departments of transportations are concerned for various reasons. There is a coalition trying to point out the negatives.

Oregon State Rail Plan Implementation Plan (OSRP-IP) – Bob Melbo

- The OSRP-IP is on the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) consent calendar for July.
- Rail Needs Inventory (RNI) Intake Form
 - Project sponsors can propose adding new projects to the RNI and can review and amend information in the RNI for existing projects.
 - Map interface: The form will feed the map and add new projects. May be able to select project from map.
 - Projects will be reviewed and approved by ODOT staff.
 - Do not yet have a communications plan on the RNI to inform interested parties after OTC approval. Eligible applicants, counties, cities, industries, Class Is and shortlines. May need to ensure parties wishing to submit a project have support of a qualified transportation provider/railroad.

Action Item: Add filter to help users find projects for which they are suggesting updates. Possibly allow to filter projects by region.

Action Item: Communication Plan discussion with consultant team over process to add projects to RNI.

- Map Update – Past projects will be added. This will allow access to data regarding past investments.

- Oregon State Rail Plan 2024
 - State Rail Plans are on a four-year cycle per Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) guidance. The implementation plan will carry forward to the 2024 plan. ODOT will work with FRA to determine what will need to be included in the 2024 plan given the OSRP-IP was finalized this year.
 - The ODOT team is working with ODOT procurement to develop a Request for Proposals (RFP) to hire a consultant to assist us with the update.

Connect Oregon and Policy Plan Update – Erik Havig

- Connect Oregon Update:
 - Two of the four dedicated projects from HB 2017 are complete and operational.
 - Mid-Willamette Valley Intermodal Center is complete and in operation.
 - Treasure Valley Intermodal project has funding issues. They are out of funding and are going to the Legislature to ask for shortfall coverage. Their efforts to engage the Legislature have been hindered by the walkout.
 - Oregon City Siding Project. There have been design changes that were substantial enough to change the nature of the project. Rail Operations is coordinating efforts on the CRISI grant.
 - Connect Oregon VIII - all agreements have been signed and projects are underway. One project is complete and a couple more are close to completion.
 - The next competitive round may begin late this year or early 2024. The only funding for the program comes from the Privilege Tax and the fund is required to have at least \$50M. Once a decision has been made regarding timing of the next competitive round, the information will be shared with advisory committees and interested groups.
 - Policy Plan Update
 - ODOT Planning will coordinate with the Public Transportation Division on the 2024 State Rail Plan update.
 - The Oregon Freight Plan was adopted by the OTC in March. Working with the Freight Advisory Committee on the implementation plan. Will be taking it before the Oregon Freight Advisory Committee for approval in July. The Freight Plan Implementation Plan will need to be adopted by OTC.
 - The Oregon Highway Plan will be the next policy update. The last full overhaul was done in 1999.
 - Putting the finishing touches on the Oregon Transportation Plan (OTP). It is a significant overhaul for the umbrella plan for all transportation modes. It is going before the OTC in July for adoption. Also, working on the implementation plan for the OTP; it will be molded into the ODOT Strategic Action Plan.

Membership Refresh – Jennifer Sellers for Kathy Holmes

- It was misstated in documentation that the committee voted to have only one union position. After a review of the minutes, it was found the committee voted to have two union positions. These positions will be open to any rail or transit union member.
- Bob is working with the Association of Oregon Counties to provide a member.
- Kathy has been working with ODOT's tribal representative and staff from the Office of Social Equity to initiate outreach to fill these new positions.
- Question for the committee – How do we identify industries with strong rail connections? In the past we have had members that meet these criteria. This had been done through the chair or the division administrator. The goal is to make this process more transparent. The goal is to fill one position on the RAC with a member from an industry that is reliant on rail. How do we identify potential applicants? How do we reach out to applicants to request applications? Could commercial groups prepare a list to reach out to?
 - Sources of potential members: Connect Oregon, Pacific Northwest Rail Shippers Association, freight rail customers

- Chair and Committee members notify groups or organizations and those entities will share with individuals to apply. Applicants should meet criteria for industry-related interest.
- Membership Sub-Committee is outlined in 03-21-2023 Minutes.
- Next step is to finalize the application form.

Action Item: Ross Lane to check with commercial team, may be able to roll this into communication surrounding RNI. Carmen Merlo will check with the Port of Portland, Trade & Economic Development team. Erik to check with past Connect Oregon applicants.

Quarterly Updates

- Public Transportation Division (PTD) -Karyn Criswell
 - All budget bills have been passed, so there are funds.
 - Waiting to see if HB3406 receives an appropriation, which would require rulemaking.
 - Nearly fully staffed except for positions this group is concerned with. The multimodal analyst position is out for recruitment.
 - Looking to build in some redundancies in case of prolonged absences.
- Passenger Rail – Bob Melbo for Kathy Holmes
 - Ridership
 - Ridership for the January through May of 2023 increased 21% compared to the same period in 2022.
 - The pre-pandemic baseline for comparison purposes is 2019. Ridership for the first five months of 2023 is 6% above 2019 ridership.
 - April ridership (9,456) was the highest ridership for that month since 2013 (10,611) and May (9,851) was the highest since May 2014 (10,276)
 - New trainsets will start arriving in late 2026.
 - The FRA Long-distance Train Studies is underway. Bob will attend the next meeting in Boise on July 18, 2023.
 - is the Amtrak Cascades has reduced capacity equipment wise. But this is not affecting Oregon ridership because in the Oregon portion of the route is rarely sold out. However, this does affect the northern portion of the corridor.
 - On-time Performance (OTP)
 - Delays for March through May were caused by:
 - 72% - Host railroad
 - 26% - Amtrak
 - 2% - Unassignable (i.e., trespasser strikes, weather-related delays, and drawbridge operation)
 - The longest delays for March through May were caused by:
 - Freight and passenger train interference;
 - Slow orders; and
 - Crew and system delays.
 - The two remaining trips to return the Amtrak Cascades to full service are expected to resume in the fall.
 - Amtrak expects to take delivery of the next generation of equipment for the Amtrak Cascades in 2026. They are the AIRO trains.

Action Item: Bob Melbo will look into the seating capacity of the new trains.

- ODOT is working with a consultant on the Service Development Plan – Implementation Plan. The modeling is a fundamental piece of the project. ODOT, David Evans and Associates, Mainline Management and Union Pacific Railroad are holding regular meetings and the base case modeling scenario is close to being finalized.

- WSDOT, with ODOT as a co-applicant submitted an application for the Federal Corridor ID Program for the Amtrak Cascades
- WSDOT also applied for the Ultra High Speed Ground Transportation grant. ODOT provided a letter of concurrence for the application.
- Freight Rail Industry – Bob Melbo and Roundtable
 - Freight rail industry business, carloads and intermodal units, are trending down; so far volumes for 2023 are down 5.6%.
 - Volumes are soft, however freight rail numbers tend to trend up later in the year. Consensus is that freight numbers will stabilize as inventories that may have been overstocked are depleted and/or moved post pandemic.
 - Still dealing with several factors, carry over from recessionary activities, economic uncertainty, and ongoing supply chain issues, primarily on the West Coast.
 - P&W seeing some of the same issues the Class 1s.
 - Majority of shippers brought in what they had and Northwest Container has been storing it.
 - OERR had fairly strong first and second quarters but have hit a wall. Commodity pricing is impacting the export market.
- Safety Update – Chris Malm
 - Ramping up use of grade crossing inspectors and Operation Lifesaver to do outreach.
 - The week of June 5th joint ODOT, WSDOT and FRA utilities team checked out problem areas between Portland and Eugene and provided outreach to general populations, high school students, and the homeless.
 - Section 113 funding process should be awarded by the end of the year. Working to get selection criteria. Hope to have money out there by the end of the year.

Public Comments

- No public comments

Agenda Build

- The next RAC quarterly meeting is 09/19/2023 in-person at the ODOT Mill Creek Building, Training Room, 555 13th St. NE Salem, OR
- Standing Topics:
 - PTD, Passenger Rail, Freight Rail, Legislative and Connect Oregon Updates
- Equity Presentation

Closing comments and Adjourn - Bruce Carswell

- Move to adjourn carried at 10:52 a.m.