

Rail Advisory Committee (RAC)

Tuesday, June 17th, 2025

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Meeting Minutes

Attending RAC Members

Bruce Carswell, Chair, Jaguar Transport Holdings

Johan Hellman, Co-Chair, BNSF Railway

Ross Lane, Genesee and Wyoming Railroad Service

Toby Van Altvorst, Goose Lake Railway

Tom Bouillion, Port of Portland

Chase Kitchen, Amtrak

Bob Krebs, AORTA

Welcome, Introductions, and Committee Business

- Quorum confirmed
- March 18, 2025, minutes approved

Connect Oregon and Policy Plan Update

- The Connect Oregon IX project grant agreements have been executed, and the projects are underway. Many of the projects from Connect Oregon VIII are almost complete. Based on current projections, the next round of Connect Oregon will take place this fall.
- The Oregon Transportation Commission has set permanent rules for establishing a Connect Oregon federal match program and a couple applications have been received.
- The Port of Newport's project to conduct dock repair work has been canceled due to a federal discretionary grant being awarded but not delivered.
- Funds for Connect Oregon grants that are awarded but not used are returned to be used in the next round of Connect Oregon grants.
- The Transportation Safety Action Plan is in progress. ODOT has reached out to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) about incorporating the Crossing Safety Action Plan into the Transportation Safety Action Plan but has not received a determination.
- Updating the Oregon Freight Plan has not begun, it is due by March 2027. This plan encompasses all modes of transportation including rail, aviation, and highway.
- ODOT is rethinking their approach to updating the Oregon Highway Plan given budget and legislative uncertainties.

Legislative and Federal Updates

- ODOT has been communicating for a while that the State Highway fund no longer covers ODOT's staffing, maintenance for roads, and other core functions. ODOT has held

conversations with the legislature's rail caucus regarding the type of investments they would like to see.

- The legislature is working on multiple funding packages with different tax increases.
- FRA announced many CRISI projects have moved into obligation. CRISI is supported at the Federal level, however there is no news on Federal-State Partnership (FSP) grants.

Oregon State Rail Plan

- Stacy Goldstein, a transportation planner at ODOT, is now managing the State Rail Plan update. Stacy is also the Deputy Project Manager on the Transportation Safety Action Plan and is looking into how the rail safety crossings fit into the larger plan.
- Initial outreach is complete and the gathering of existing conditions work. Outreach work included surveys, interested party interviews, and tribal consultation.
- The first RAC subcommittee meeting will be on July 1, 2025. Two more meetings will be held, in fall and winter.
- The survey for the State Rail Plan Update closed on May 30, 2025, and consultants are working to prepare summaries of the survey as well as for interested party interviews.
- Next steps include hosting a virtual open house, completing the future needs assessment, and completing the service and investment plan. Updates to the rail forecast, the rail needs assessment, the service plan, and the investment plan will take place in fall and winter 2025. The State Rail Plan will be drafted and finalized for the Oregon Transportation Commission approval by Summer 2026.
- RAC members expressed concern that previous updates did not account for changes to the way the Oregon rail network is used. These changes include economic changes to industries that rely upon the Oregon rail network and mergers that have affected carloads.
- The Rail Needs Inventory is the current instrument for logging and tracking projects for the State Rail Plan and is a living document to which projects can be submitted at any time.

Rail Safety and Compliance OARS

- ODOT's Commerce and Compliance Division (CCD), is working to update Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs) related to rail safety. CCD requested that RAC members review the changes the rail safety and regulatory branch were making and provide feedback.
- ODOT works closely with railroads and FRA inspectors, and changes made to the rules will provide clarity and will not take out any important verbiage. For the most part, the updates are streamlining language surrounding crossings and the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD).
- There is concern that even minor or mundane changes can turn into requirements that impact the rail industry. The concern of turning recommended practices into regulations

is that sometimes inspectors will make up their own interpretation of a rule and apply that leading to unnecessary fines and impacts.

- Action Item: Karla Tackett will send the rule changes to Kathy Holmes and Bob Melbo, who will then distribute the documents to RAC members that have a stake in these changes.
- Kathy Holmes requested any RAC committee members that are interested in reviewing the rule changes to let her know in order to not miss anyone who may be interested.

Modal Capital Investment Plan

- The ODOT Capital Investment Plan came from a 2024 ODOT strategic review which identified a lack of solid plan to identify what ODOT's future investments and aims to close the gap between long-range plans such as the Oregon Transportation Plan and what is being included in the four-year Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). This plan will better inform ODOT officials of the long-term impacts of short-term decisions given the increased clarity over future investments.
- ODOT is working on a mid-range planning document to develop alongside the Capital Investment Plan.
- The goal of the Capital Investment Plan is to create a fiscally constrained list of planned investments for projects, initiatives, and emergency management. It will be updated annually.
- While the project list will be fiscally constrained there will aspirational investments which may not be programmed into the STIP but may have federal funding opportunities. It will cover a 10-year period and will improve coordination. Projects will be screened through goals and metrics that are going to be set by the OTC in a meeting at the end of July. This will not affect the current 2024 to 2027 STIP cycle. After the metrics are set by the OTC, ODOT will screen projects using a qualitative and quantitative approach to balance the list of investments based on rural versus urban and risk versus return.

Quarterly Updates

RAC Membership Refresh

- The format of the charter will need to align with recent changes to ODOT's advisory committee charter template. The template has not been finalized. The RAC charter will be updated once the template has been approved.
- Tom Bouillion has been approved by the Director's office and is officially the Port representative for the Rail Advisory Committee as of June 16, 2025.

- A letter was sent to various rail unions in early June with a June 30th deadline to submit applications to become a new RAC member. Currently ODOT is yet to receive any applications.
- Bruce Carswell is working on recruitment for the vacant shortline position but needs to follow up with potential recruits.
- The RAC chair position expires in January. Bruce Carswell and Johan Hellman are no longer eligible to serve as Chair and Co-chair since they have both served their two four-year terms.

Passenger Rail Updates

- Ridership
 - The Amtrak Cascades saw record ridership in 2024. In 2025, ridership trends were tracking to surpass 2024 ridership. However, due to corrosion issues, Horizon equipment was pulled out of service which caused a downshift in ridership. Full service resumed in early April when the Horizon equipment was replaced with a smaller fleet of Amfleet equipment. The changeover has had somewhat of an impact on ridership which is slightly below 2024 levels.
- Capacity:
 - The Amfleet equipment has roughly 60 percent of the capacity of Horizon equipment. There is a lack of capacity to store bikes and a lack of baggage cars.
 - Amtrak is investigating to determine the cost of repairing the Horizon cars.
 - New Airo cars are coming in 2026 which will remedy capacity issues and other issues across the system.
- On-time performance dropped slightly from 73 percent in the first quarter of 2025 to 72 percent in the second quarter. In May, OPT was very close to the 80 percent goal at 79 percent.

High Speed Rail

- The Cascades high-speed rail project is making its way through step 2 of the FRA's Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID).
- The project's executive leadership committee met in April to update new partner agency executives on the project background and the timeline for activities to be completed over the next four years.
- Outreach and engagement plans will be developed this year, and engagement efforts will start in 2026. The plans include engaging with communities, railroads, tribal communities, and partner agencies. The plans will be submitted to the FRA in November 2025 and if approved will go into effect in January 2026 and continue through 2027.
- The result of step 2 of the CID program will be a service development plan for the entire corridor.

Modeling

- ODOT is working with Union Pacific to identify the capacity and future capital improvements for the railroad line between Portland and Eugene. They have developed a draft of a three-stage implementation plan and a project list. The list is currently under review by Union Pacific.
- The improvements are necessary for any additional expansion of the Amtrak Cascades between Portland and Eugene as well as future growth for Union Pacific. An upgraded network, that includes the proposed improvements, will provide both freight and passenger rail with improved performance.
- The improvements will be done in three stages. Completion of stage one would provide capacity for a third-round trip to the Amtrak Cascades service. Stage two would add capacity for a fourth-round trip and stage three capacity for two more round trips.
- ODOT met with FRA in March to look at some of the metrics and work that has been completed. The FRA is pleased with the current progress of the work.
- A working group meeting will be scheduled with Amtrak, UP, FRA and ODOT to review the final analysis.

Freight Rail Industry

- The last mile of the Port of Tillamook Bay Railroad was sold to Portland & Western effectively removing the Port of Tillamook Bay as a shortline railroad. The rest of the line that wasn't sold has been railbanked in tandem with 45 miles leased to the Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad.
- Nationwide carloads are up about two and a half percent in the first 23 weeks of 2025. The railroad industry is facing significant uncertainty over the import business due to uncertainty over tariffs.
- BNSF Railway has not seen much change in volume. The network is also moving very well, and the health of the network has been very good recently.
- Shortlines are seeing the same uncertainty in the market as others have mentioned. There have been increases in some carloads and decreases in others.
- Some shortline railroads are moving forward on CRISI grants awarded in October.
- The Port of Portland recently remodeled its Terminal 2 site and signed a lease with Zog Timber Solutions to create a 100,000 square foot factory to manufacture modular housing units. Zog Timber Solutions is interested in having a rail service for outbound products.

Pacific Northwest Economic Region 2025 Annual Summit

- The Pacific Northwest Rail Summit will take place from October 15th through October 17th in Portland. It will be hosted by the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER), a

nonprofit created by the states of Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, Washington, and Montana, as well as the five western provinces in Canada.

- The summit will be a gathering of passenger and freight rail interests from across the region. Discussions will focus on investments in rail and aligning a vision for a regional rail network. Last year's summit held in Spokane had 100 in-person attendees and around 50 virtual attendees including nine state legislators.
- Topics will include the reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Bill, Washington Senator Cantwell's Promoting Resilient Supply Chains Act of 2025, and regional coordination and cooperation. Day 1 will focus on the national funding outlook and rail-oriented development. Day 2 will focus on ports, short lines, and supply chains. Day 3 will focus on rail policy tours.
- The RAC will support the summit's agenda development and will identify potential speakers for the summit.

Public Comments

- No public comments were made.

Agenda Build

- The next RAC meeting will take place on September 16th. The meeting will be held in-person and virtually.
 - The finalized transportation funding package will be discussed.
 - Charter
 - Economic forecast for the State of Oregon. Can ODOT provide an economist for a quick ten-minute view?
 - **Closing Comments**
- The meeting was adjourned at 11:36 A.M.