



# Oregon Passenger Rail Profile

Oregon State Rail Plan Update - 2025

Draft Chapter Update | Task 2.2.2 Deliverable | November 7, 2025

Prepared For:



Prepared By:





## Contents

---

1	Introduction.....	0
2	Passenger Rail System .....	0
	2.1 -- Intercity Rail Passenger Station Facilities .....	2
	2.2 -- Amtrak Cascades.....	3
	2.3 -- Operation Funding Needs and Sources .....	4
	2.3.1 Farebox Recovery .....	4
	2.3.2 Capital Funding .....	6
3	Passenger Rail Service Objectives and Evaluation.....	8
	3.1 -- Passenger Rail Usage within Oregon.....	8
	3.2 -- Amtrak Cascades Service.....	9
	3.2.1 Ridership.....	9
	3.2.2 On-time Performance.....	10
	3.2.3 Delays .....	11
	3.2.4 Travel Time and Train Speed .....	12
	3.3 -- Amtrak Coast Starlight and Empire Builder .....	14
	3.3.1 Ridership.....	14
	3.3.2 On-time Performance.....	15
	3.3.3 Delays .....	15
	3.3.4 Challenges.....	16
	3.4 -- Safety and Security of Passenger Rail .....	16
	3.5 -- Commuter Rail – Westside Express Service.....	18

## Figures

Figure 1. Passenger Rail Service in Oregon .....	1
Figure 2. POINT <i>Thruway</i> Bus Connecting Service in Oregon .....	2
Figure 3. Oregon Amtrak Cascades Operating Cost, Revenue and Farebox Recovery Rate: 2020–2024.....	5
Figure 4. Oregon Amtrak Cascades Ridership: 1995–2024 .....	9
Figure 5. Seasonal Variation of Oregon Amtrak Cascades Ridership: 2019–2024.....	10
Figure 6. Oregon Amtrak Cascades On-time Performance: 2021–2024 .....	11
Figure 7. Amtrak Coast Starlight and Empire Builder Ridership .....	14
Figure 8. Coast Starlight and Empire Builder Station Boardings in the Pacific Northwest .....	15
Figure 9. TriMet Rail System Map: MAX, Streetcar and WES .....	20
Figure 10. WES Ridership and Fare Recovery Ratios (FY 2009–FY 2024) <b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>	

## Tables

Table 1. Oregon Amtrak Stations and Connecting Services.....	3
Table 2. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Annual Appropriations .....	7
Table 3. FRA Highway-Rail Crossing Incidents and Fatalities: Amtrak 2020–2025 .....	17
Table 4. FRA Highway-Rail Crossing Incidents and Fatalities for Westside Express Service for 2020.....	19



## 1 Introduction

---

Passenger rail serves a variety of mobility needs. In Oregon, these include urban transit in the Portland metropolitan region, intercity services linking the metropolitan regions in the Pacific Northwest and long-distance services connecting Oregon with other U.S. regions. In the Portland region, urban transit service is provided through a network of electrically operated MAX light rail and streetcar lines and a single commuter rail line. The light rail and streetcar lines operate separately and apart from the national railroad network and are not directly addressed through this State Rail Plan. Portland's Westside Express Service commuter line, providing commuter services, along with Amtrak intercity and long-distance services serving Oregon, all operate over the national rail network: These are the focus of this State Rail Plan and are discussed further in the following section.

## 2 Passenger Rail System

---

Federal law classifies intercity passenger rail services operating in Oregon into two types: (1) corridors exceeding 750 miles in length, which are classified as long-distance trains, and (2) corridors less than 750 miles in length, which are considered short-distance corridors. For long-distance services, Amtrak bears full responsibility for its operation, with costs covered by a combination of fare revenues and federal operating support. However, states, including Oregon, and local communities do have some involvement with these services, particularly with stations. For short-distance corridor train services, Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) fully shifted financial responsibility to states (or other sponsors) as of October 2013.

Amtrak operates three routes in Oregon, two long-distance route and one short-distance route, as shown in **Figure 1**:

- **Empire Builder**: an Amtrak long-distance train that links Chicago with Portland and Seattle via Milwaukee, St. Paul/Minneapolis, Fargo, and Spokane over 2,300 miles. Operating daily, the train splits in Spokane into two separate trains that operate to the route's two western termini. Portland is the only stop for the Empire Builder in Oregon, although stops along the north bank of the Columbia River at Wishram and Bingham-White Salmon in Washington also provide access to nearby Oregon residents. Along its route, the Empire Builder operates over the following four host railroads, from west to east: BNSF Railway (BNSF), Minnesota Commercial, Canadian Pacific (CP) and Metra (Chicago-area commuter rail). BNSF owns and maintains the track within Oregon.
- **Coast Starlight**: a daily Amtrak long-distance train that links Los Angeles with Seattle via Oakland, Sacramento and Portland over 1,300 miles. In Oregon, the Coast Starlight stops in Klamath Falls, Chemult, Eugene, Albany, Salem and Portland. Along its route, the Coast Starlight uses tracks owned by Metrolink (Los Angeles), Union Pacific (UP), BNSF and Sound Transit. Within Oregon, UP owns and maintains the tracks and right of way, except for the BNSF-owned segment between Portland Union Station and the Washington state line.



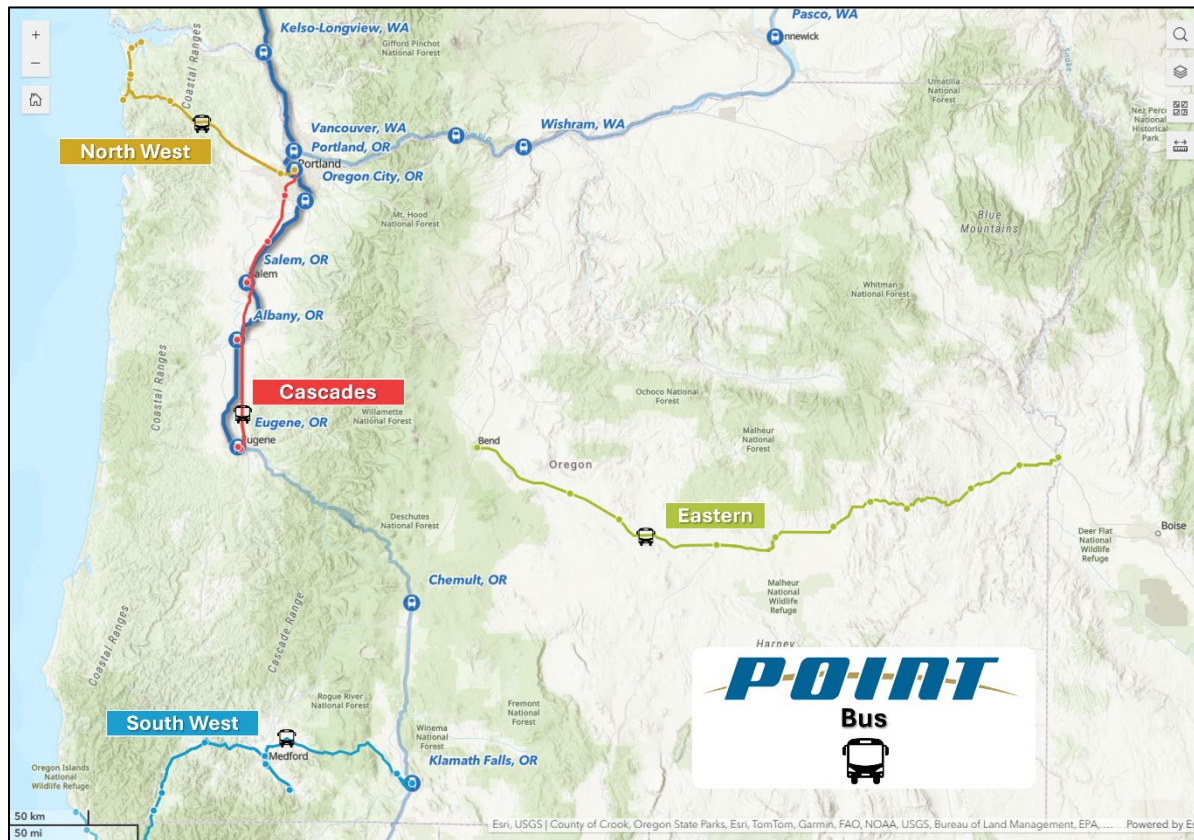
- Amtrak Cascades:** a multi-frequency daily intercity service, which travels about 467 miles, along the corridor from Eugene to Vancouver, British Columbia. In Oregon, Amtrak Cascades serves the Willamette Valley with stops in Eugene, Albany, Salem, Oregon City and Portland. The Amtrak Cascades travels along the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor, which is one of 11 federally designated high-speed rail corridors.

**Figure 1. Passenger Rail Service in Oregon**



Supporting Oregon’s intercity passenger train network are dedicated bus services contracted by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). Operating as *POINT Thruway* (see **Figure 2**), these bus services enhance train service frequencies and provide access to communities not directly served by rail, thereby improving transportation access and boosting the overall utility of passenger rail service in Oregon. Most of these bus services are operated by private carriers under contract with the state, although some are privately operated with no state contract.

Figure 2. POINT Thruway Bus Connecting Service in Oregon



## 2.1 Intercity Rail Passenger Station Facilities

The Empire Builder, Coast Starlight and Amtrak Cascades serve a total of seven stations in Oregon. **Table 1** shows the Amtrak routes that serve each station, along with parking, Cascades POINT Thruway dedicated intercity bus connections and local public transit connections. Local public transit is indicated only where there is direct access at the station around the hours of train operation.

Portland Union Station forms the hub for Oregon's intercity passenger rail services, with the Empire Builder, Coast Starlight and Amtrak Cascades all calling at the station. In addition to Portland, local public transit services are also available at Salem, Albany and Eugene.



**Table 1. Oregon Amtrak Stations and Connecting Services**

Stations	Empire Builder	Coast Starlight	Amtrak Cascades	Parking Spaces	POINT Thruway and Other Bus Services	Other Transit Connections
Portland Union Station	✓	✓	✓	200 long-term 25 short-term	Cascades POINT, NorthWest POINT	TriMet MAX (Green, Yellow and Orange lines) and Bus, Caravan Airport Shuttle, Tillamook Bus, Bend Breeze, Microtransit (bike and scooter share)
Oregon City Station			✓	50 long-term		TriMet Bus
Salem Station		✓	✓	30 long-term 30 short-term	Cascades POINT	Salem-Keizer Transit, Greyhound/FlixBus, Tillamook Bus, Shuttle Oregon, Microtransit (bike and scooter share)
Albany Station		✓	✓	50 long-term 20 short-term	Cascades POINT	Albany Transit System, Coast to Valley Express, Linn Shuttle
Eugene Station		✓	✓	36 long-term 8 short-term	Cascades POINT, Eugene-Bend Porter Stage	Lane Transit District, Greyhound/FlixBus, Diamond Express, Bolt Bus, Microtransit (bike and scooter share)
Chemult Station		✓		25 long-term 6 short-term		
Klamath Falls Station		✓		60 long-term 20 short-term	SouthWest POINT	Basin Transit Service, Klamath Tribe, Sage Stage

## 2.2 Amtrak Cascades

Amtrak Cascades is an intercity rail service that extends 467 miles from Eugene, Oregon, to Vancouver, BC. In Oregon, Amtrak Cascades service operates on the same corridor as the Coast Starlight, using tracks and right of way that are owned by UP between Portland and Eugene, and owned by BNSF between Portland Union Station and the Washington state line.

The frequency of Amtrak Cascades service varies by segment. Between Portland and Eugene, there are two round trips daily; between Portland and Seattle, there are six round trips daily; and between Seattle and Vancouver, BC, there are two round trips daily. Most trains traverse only part of the corridor, with schedules designed to serve key markets at attractive times, ensure service reliability, optimize equipment utilization and meet the needs of the host railroad. With a scheduled travel time of two hours and 35 minutes for the 124 miles between Portland and Eugene, the average speed amounts to 42 miles per hour (mph).

Operating the Amtrak Cascades service involves a number of public and private entities in the United States and Canada. In addition to ODOT, key entities involved in providing or supporting intercity passenger rail service include:

- **Amtrak** – operator of the service and holder of the contractual rights to operate over BNSF and UP rail lines.
- **ODOT** – Co-sponsor of the Amtrak Cascades service.
- **Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT)** – Co-sponsor of the Amtrak Cascades service with ODOT.
- **UP and BNSF** – the two Class I railroads that host the Amtrak Cascades service.
- **Talgo** – the company that manufactured and maintains the Series 8 Talgo (Oregon) trainsets in operation in the Amtrak Cascades service.

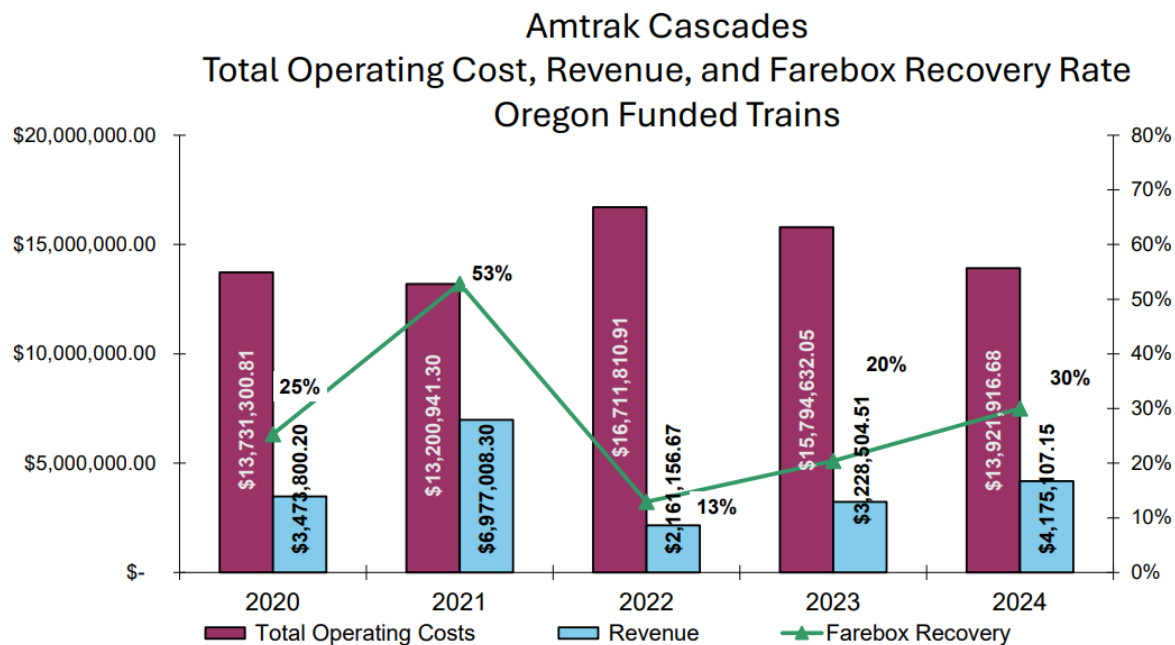
## 2.3 Operation Funding Needs and Sources

Amtrak Cascades is funded by the states of Oregon and Washington. In Oregon, ticket revenues fund approximately 30 percent of Amtrak Cascades' operating costs for Oregon, while the state funds 70 percent of the Oregon operating costs. As co-sponsors of the service, Oregon and Washington have significant control over Amtrak Cascades operational and business decisions affecting costs and revenues. Oregon and Washington also have influence over whether Amtrak Cascades service emphasizes operational cost recovery as opposed to encouraging maximum ridership.

### 2.3.1 Farebox Recovery

**Figure 3** summarizes the farebox recovery rate pertaining to the Oregon portion of the Amtrak Cascades corridor. This rate considers all revenue sources, including ticket revenues and additional sources such as food and beverage sales, and all costs to operate the route including operational costs, capital equipment and host railroad costs. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the farebox recovery rate was around 25 percent. In 2024, the farebox recovery rate reached 30 percent.

**Figure 3. Oregon Amtrak Cascades Operating Cost, Revenue and Farebox Recovery**  
**Rate: 2020–2024<sup>1</sup>**



*Source: ODOT Public Transportation Division - Based on financial billing reconciliation data from Amtrak.*

Oregon and Washington are the governmental entities responsible for Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service in the Pacific Northwest and have a long history of collaboration contributing to the success of the service. The states recognize that partnership is the only way to overcome the significant hurdles in order to continue the success of the Amtrak Cascades service. Their shared vision is to continue cooperating to develop a model for changing from operating the service as separate segments to operating it as one integrated corridor with shared resources, and for working toward achieving common goals. In the future, it is anticipated that this shared vision will increase ridership, enhance customer retention and service, and result in Amtrak Cascades services being an increasingly competitive transportation choice for travelers in the region.

<sup>1</sup> Cares Act funding was received in 2021 to help reduce the financial impacts of COVID-19 on the Cascades service.

Data for 2023 changed slightly from the 2023 annual report because the report was published before a full year of data was available.

### 2.3.2 Capital Funding

#### State

Investments and improvements in infrastructure are required for the expansion of passenger rail in Oregon in the future. Current funding in Oregon for passenger rail is from state sources. State funding sources include the Transportation Operating Fund (TOF) and custom license plate revenues. 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 Connect Oregon program provides State funds for rail improvements in the absence of a dedicated and sustainable funding source for freight and passenger rail investments. Created in 2005 by the Oregon Legislature, Connect Oregon has become a national model for public-private partnerships and has proven to be an innovative infrastructure investment program for Oregon. It uses public fund investments to leverage private-sector investments that provide a benefit to Oregon's multimodal transportation system and the state's critical trade-sector economy.

Connect Oregon grants have rehabilitated infrastructure needed to sustain existing commercial activities or start new ones.

ODOT requires Connect Oregon applicants to provide documentation and engineering and financial data to support the need for and benefits from projects. Initial eligibility reviews ensure that both public and private sector applicants meet stringent program requirements, proving fiscal responsibility and financial capacity. All applications are subject to modal committee review with input from Area Commissions on Transportation, who provide a regional perspective on the need and viability of projects. The Oregon Transportation Commission typically makes the final funding decision on Connect Oregon investments.

As originally enacted, Connect Oregon was not envisioned to be used as a matching fund mechanism for obtaining federal grants. However, in 2024 Oregon's state legislature allocated that a portion of Connect Oregon funding would be available for eligible entities specifically for use as match to leverage federal discretionary grants.

#### Federal

New federal funding opportunities for passenger rail were introduced under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law of 2021 (BIL), and annual appropriations are summarized in **Table 2**. These federal funds are distributed as discretionary grants and require a match from state, local and/or private funds. Eligible entities should continue to pursue these federal programs, and advocate for the expansion and reauthorization of these programs at the federal level.

The United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant program provides funding for capital projects that reduce the state of good repair backlog, improve performance, or expand or establish new intercity passenger rail service, including privately operated intercity passenger rail service, if an eligible applicant is involved.

The BIL created the USDOT Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program, which guides the development of new or enhanced intercity passenger rail and high-speed passenger rail services that will help bolster economic growth throughout the United States.

The Amtrak Cascades corridor is a part of the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) CID, Program, which is intended to accelerate funding for corridor improvement projects for state-supported passenger rail services through a non-competitive funding program. WSDOT led the effort to enter into the CID Program on behalf of the Amtrak Cascades corridor, with ODOT as a co-applicant.

**Table 2. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Annual Appropriations**

	Agency	Federal Fiscal Year					Total
		2022 <sup>2</sup>	2023	2024	2025	2026	
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) National Infrastructure Investments	USDOT	\$2.3B	\$1.5B	\$1.5B	\$1.5B	\$1.5B	\$8.3B
Amtrak National Network	FRA	\$4.7B	\$3.2B	\$3.2B	\$3.2B	\$3.2B	\$17.5B
Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI)	FRA	\$1.6B	\$1B	\$1B	\$1B	\$1B	\$5.6B
Railroad Crossing Elimination Program	FRA	\$600M	\$600M	\$600M	\$600M	\$600M	\$3.0B
Federal State Partnership (FSP) for Intercity Passenger Rail Grants	FRA	\$9.5B	\$9.5B	\$7.2B	\$7.2B	\$7.2B	\$40.6B
Restoration and Enhancement	FRA	\$0	\$50M	\$50M	\$50M	\$50M	\$200M
Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID)	FRA	\$480M (5% of FSP funding)	\$480M	\$360M	\$360M	\$360M	\$2.04B <sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> IIJA and Annual Appropriations.

<sup>3</sup> FRA is allowed by the IIJA to utilize 5 percent of appropriated FSP monies to fund the CID program (FRA Budget Estimates Fiscal Year 2023, Federal Railroad Administration, p. 133, as submitted to the Committees on Appropriations, [https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-04/FRA\\_Budget\\_Estimates\\_FY23.pdf](https://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/2022-04/FRA_Budget_Estimates_FY23.pdf)).



## Summary

In conclusion, there are several state and federal funding sources and programs that can provide for potential investment in passenger rail in Oregon. However, in general, it is constrained by the limited current funding levels. In addition, passenger rail in Oregon 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.

## 3 Passenger Rail Service Objectives and Evaluation

---

This section summarizes the recent performance of and the key challenges facing Amtrak Cascades, the Empire Builder and the Coast Starlight. Utilizing available data, key measures such as ridership, on-time performance and causes of delay are examined. A far more detailed analysis of Amtrak Cascades service is underway as part of the Oregon Passenger Rail Environmental Impact Statement Service Development Plan update, which will identify a set of specific capital projects aimed at improving passenger rail service between Portland and the Eugene-Springfield urban areas.

### 3.1 Passenger Rail Usage within Oregon

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, approximately 9 percent (94,000 passengers) of the total Amtrak intercity rail trips in the state were intrastate trips in which both the traveler's origin and destination were in Oregon. In FY 2023, the state's top three intrastate Amtrak Cascades travel markets were:

1. **Portland-Eugene:** 51.3 percent of total boardings in Eugene were bound for Portland; 9.7 percent of total boardings in Portland alighted in Eugene.
2. **Portland-Salem:** 31.8 percent of total boardings in Salem were headed to Portland; just over 3.4 percent of total boardings in Portland alighted in Salem.
3. **Portland-Albany:** 32.9 percent of total boardings in Albany were bound for Portland; just below 2.4 percent of total boardings in Portland alighted in Albany.

Travel between cities in Oregon for which Portland was neither an origin nor a destination represented a small share of Oregon's total interstate and intrastate trips. The largest travel markets between cities other than Portland were Salem-Eugene (6.1 percent of all intrastate boardings and alightings), Eugene-Oregon City (8.4 percent), Albany-Oregon City (2.5 percent) and Eugene-Albany (2.4 percent). Detailed travel characteristics are presented in the Passenger Rail Needs Assessment Technical Memorandum.

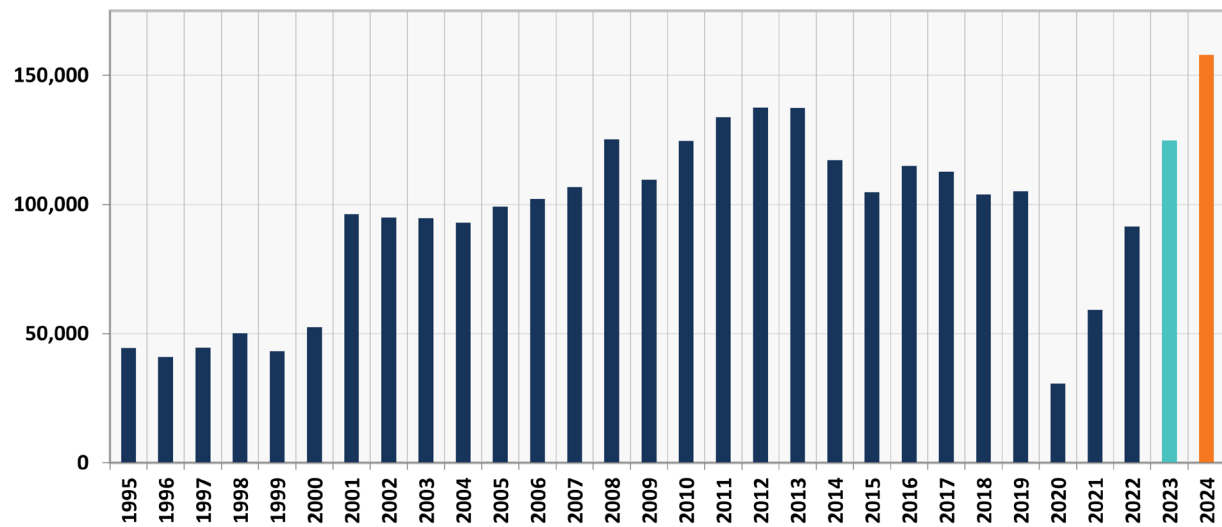
During FY 2023, approximately 48.5 percent of Amtrak trips with an origin or destination in Oregon were interstate trips, and the vast majority of these were associated with Washington's Puget Sound region. Portland featured the largest share of boardings for trips with destinations outside the state (43 percent). At 51 percent of all trips originating in Oregon, the most popular market for travelers accessing Amtrak in Oregon is Seattle, which is served by Amtrak Cascades and the Coast Starlight. Intrastate Oregon travel represented the next busiest market (15.8 percent). The corridor to the Bay Area and Sacramento, which is served by the Coast Starlight, and destinations along the Empire Builder corridor followed with 8.4 percent and 5.8 percent of total ridership, respectively.

## 3.2 Amtrak Cascades Service

### 3.2.1 Ridership

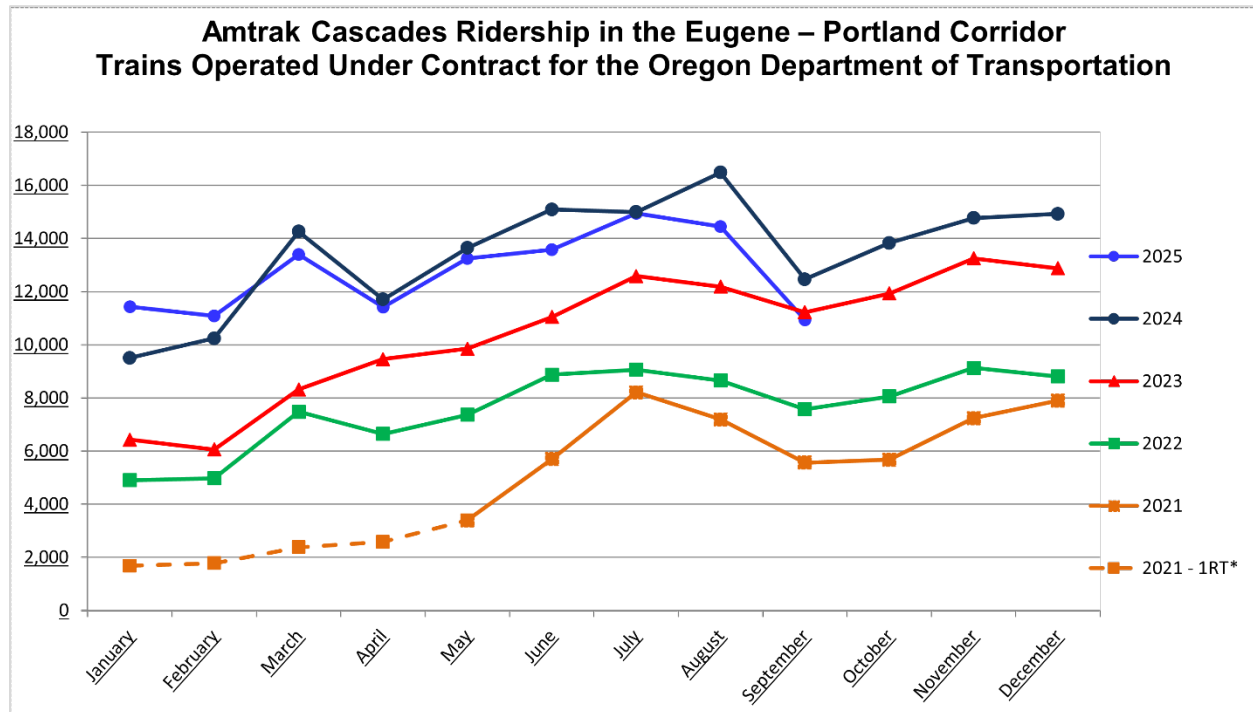
Overall ridership on Amtrak Cascades has more than recovered, achieving all-time record ridership since the 2020 pandemic, as **Figure 4** and **Figure 5** illustrate. Passenger rail ridership on the Amtrak Cascades service between Portland and Eugene (which also serves stations in Oregon City, Salem and Albany) has increased 22 percent since 2009, and 238 percent since 1995. The forecast is that ridership will continue to increase along with population growth in the Willamette Valley and as service is added in the future. By 2035, the population of the Willamette Valley is forecast to reach approximately 3.6 million. Overall, these trends indicate a steadily growing demand for intercity passenger rail services in Oregon.

**Figure 4. Oregon Amtrak Cascades Ridership: 1995–2024**



Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025

**Figure 5** shows the seasonal variations in Amtrak Cascades ridership, which are similar to those of travel on highways. Ridership declines in winter months, then jumps during spring break. Ridership then continues to climb, generally peaking in August. Ridership drops back down in September, and generally then increases during November with Thanksgiving and the December the end-of-year holidays.

**Figure 5. Seasonal Variation of Oregon Amtrak Cascades Ridership: 2021-2025<sup>4</sup>**

\*RT = Roundtrip PDX-EUG

Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025.

### 3.2.2 On-time Performance

Reliable, on-time service is essential for attracting and retaining passengers. To ensure that the Amtrak Cascades corridor provides this type of service, ODOT and Amtrak have agreed to measure endpoint on-time performance (OTP) with a goal of achieving it at least 80 percent of the time.

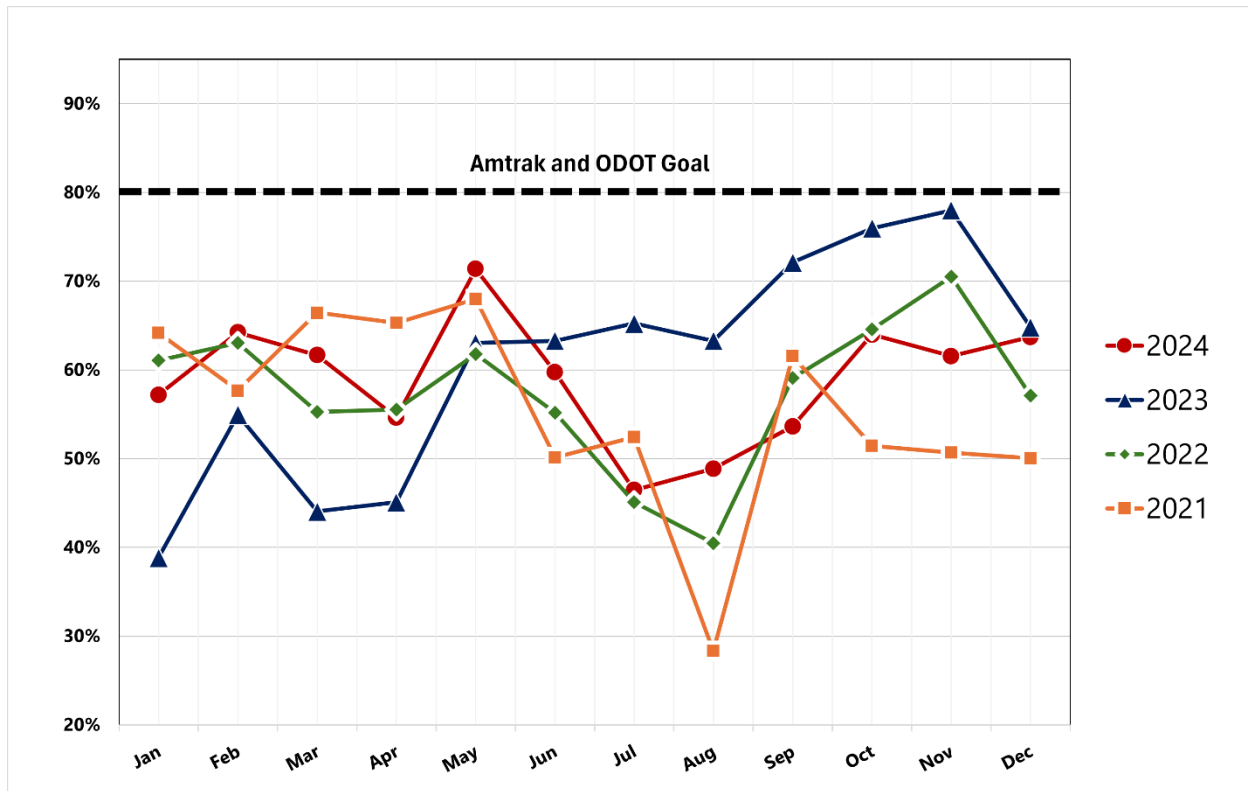
To analyze Amtrak Cascades performance specifically within Oregon, ODOT separately measures OTP for the Portland-Eugene corridor segment using a “Public OTP” metric, which measures the percentage of trains that arrive within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time printed on the public schedule.

OTP by Amtrak Cascades for FY 2023 was 64 percent and in FY 2024 was 58.3 percent. The Operating Agreement between ODOT and Amtrak establishes a goal of 80 percent OTP. Amtrak

<sup>4</sup> 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 time frame when the service was reduced to one round trip daily.

Cascades' OTP has continued to underperform since the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 6. Oregon Amtrak Cascades On-time Performance: 2021–2024<sup>5</sup>**



Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2024.

### 3.2.3 Delays

During federal FY 2023, the primary reported reasons Amtrak Cascades did not meet its OTP goal were:

- Freight train interference:
  - Conflicts between Amtrak Cascades trains and freight trains emerging from the largely single-track railroad between Portland and Eugene, with shorter Amtrak trains often taking sidings to accommodate long freight trains.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

- Temporary slow orders:
  - Slow orders can be issued during weather-related events or to accommodate track maintenance work.
- Passenger train interference:
  - Conflicts between Amtrak long-distance services and Amtrak Cascades can occur for similar infrastructural constraints as freight train interference.
- Amtrak equipment issues:
  - General equipment failures, often related to the increasing average age of Amtrak's national fleet.
- Crew and system issues:
  - Train crews had to be rehired in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, reducing the quantity of available personnel. Train crews also adhere to industry rules regarding hours of service, which can decrease their availability.

### 3.2.4 Travel Time and Train Speed

Travel times that significantly exceed alternative options such as private automobile and air are an impediment to attracting additional ridership. For the Portland-Eugene corridor, the present travel time of 2 hours and 35 minutes compares unfavorably with the approximately 2-hour driving time between the cities during off-peak hours. Travel times are comparable for peak hours. ODOT's long-term goal is to reduce the trip time to 2 hours.

The current route can support passenger speeds of up to 79 mph, and the overall average speed is 42 miles per hour. Reasons for this average speed are several, but are primarily caused by track geometry, speed restrictions, dwell time at the three intermediate stations, and accommodation for meeting and passing freight traffic. At present, the line is single track, has little reserve capacity and is configured to handle only the traffic volumes that now utilize it. Thus, reducing travel time will require significant improvements to the infrastructure of the UP-owned route.

Distances between markets, population and limited highway capacity make the Amtrak Cascades corridor, including the Eugene-Portland segment, well suited for successful passenger rail service. However, achieving the full potential of this service will require addressing three key constraints: frequency, travel times and reliability, and connectivity, as discussed below. A fourth element—service quality (amenities, comfort, access to Wi-Fi, mobile phone connectivity, on-board food, etc.)—also plays a significant role. In the case of the Amtrak Cascades, service quality is perceived to be good and thus is not a constraint to growth at this time.

- **Frequency:** The present two Amtrak Cascades roundtrips and the Coast Starlight between Eugene and Portland do not provide sufficient schedule options for many travelers, particularly business travelers, who desire more choices to meet their travel needs. Cascades POINT *Thruway* buses fill in schedule gaps and provide high quality bus service with air conditioning, electrical outlets and Wi-Fi, but do not provide the same level of comfort and amenities that are available on the train.
- **Travel times and reliability:** As mentioned above, passenger rail travel time between Eugene and Portland's Union Station is 2 hours and 35 minutes (not including any



delays) in 2025. Increased traffic congestion on the Interstate 5 corridor and/or improved travel times that are at least as fast as travel by private automobile will make passenger rail more competitive. Reliability is equally important; if the trains operate on schedule, travelers are more likely to use them.

- **Connectivity:** Improving access to and from stations and public transportation system connectivity can lower the overall time and effort required to use the Amtrak Cascades service and expand transportation options for travelers. Understanding that there are easy-to-use, safe and reliable connections to the train station or a passenger's destination can make the difference between taking the train or using a different travel mode.

Capacity and the operational needs of the freight rail system are the greatest constraints on improving Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service. Coordinated operational planning with UP and BNSF is a necessity to ensure efficient and reliable passenger rail service. There are significant questions and challenges to resolve for improving infrastructure in the future; however, ODOT is working closely with these host railroads to develop plans that will accommodate future freight and passenger services.

Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service faces competition from other modes of passenger transportation, particularly private motor vehicles and, to a lesser extent, intercity buses. Commercial air services are present in Portland, Eugene, Seattle-Tacoma and Bellingham, WA and in Vancouver, BC. Most trips along the corridor are by private automobile, with air playing a much smaller role except in the Vancouver, BC market.



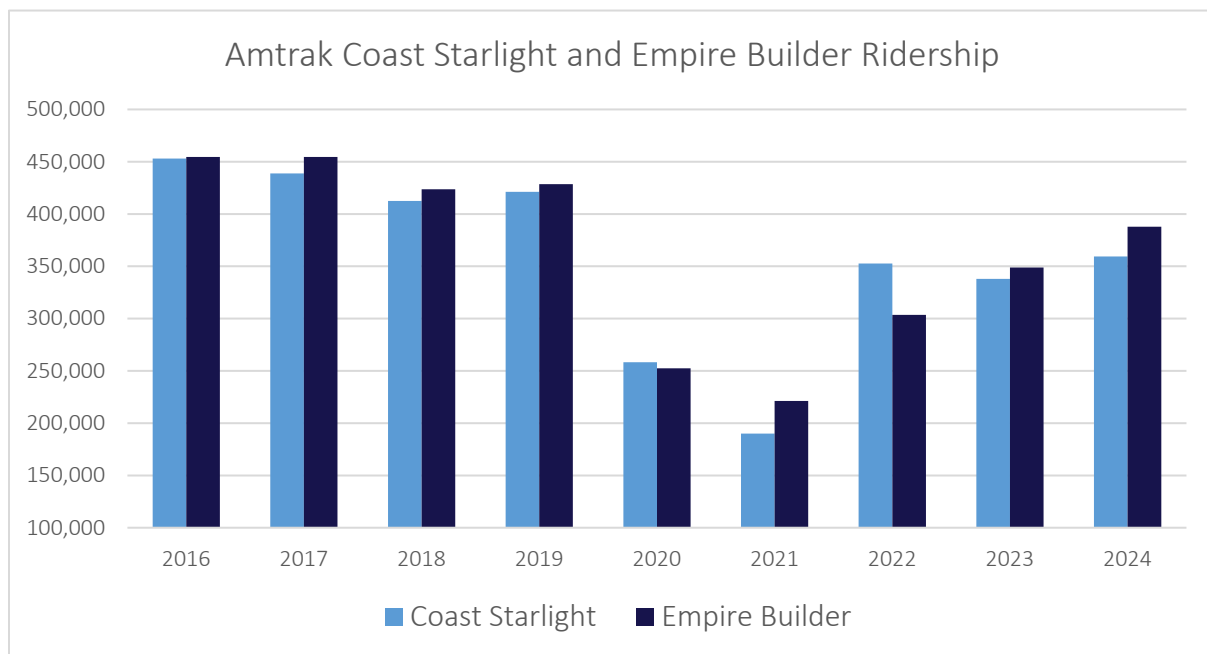
### 3.3 Amtrak Coast Starlight and Empire Builder

#### 3.3.1 Ridership

**Figure 7** shows ridership for the Coast Starlight and the Empire Builder for 2016 through 2024. Amtrak’s long-distance trains experienced less of a drop in ridership during the recent pandemic than its other business lines. This phenomenon was partially due to the spatial segmentation offered by the sleeping cars that are unique to long-distance trains and that enjoyed relatively strong business from socially distanced passengers in 2020 and 2021.

The Empire Builder and Coast Starlight have also experienced a slower recovery in the wake of the pandemic than did Amtrak Cascades. Given high prices and load factors experienced by these services, indicating strong demand, this slower recovery largely is owed to passenger capacity issues with Amtrak’s equipment deployment strategy and the average age of its fleet. Both the Empire Builder and the Coast Starlight trains presently operate with heavily depreciated 40-year-old Superliner equipment and significantly shorter consists than they have historically. Amtrak has stated that it does not intend to begin the procurement process for the Superliner fleet until after 2025, meaning that the equipment used by the only passenger trains serving southern Oregon and (via connection across the Columbia River) eastern Oregon will have to wait until they reach an average age of nearly 50 years before there is even an established timeline for their replacement. The shortfall could lead to an existential threat to these essential services.

**Figure 7. Amtrak Coast Starlight and Empire Builder Ridership**

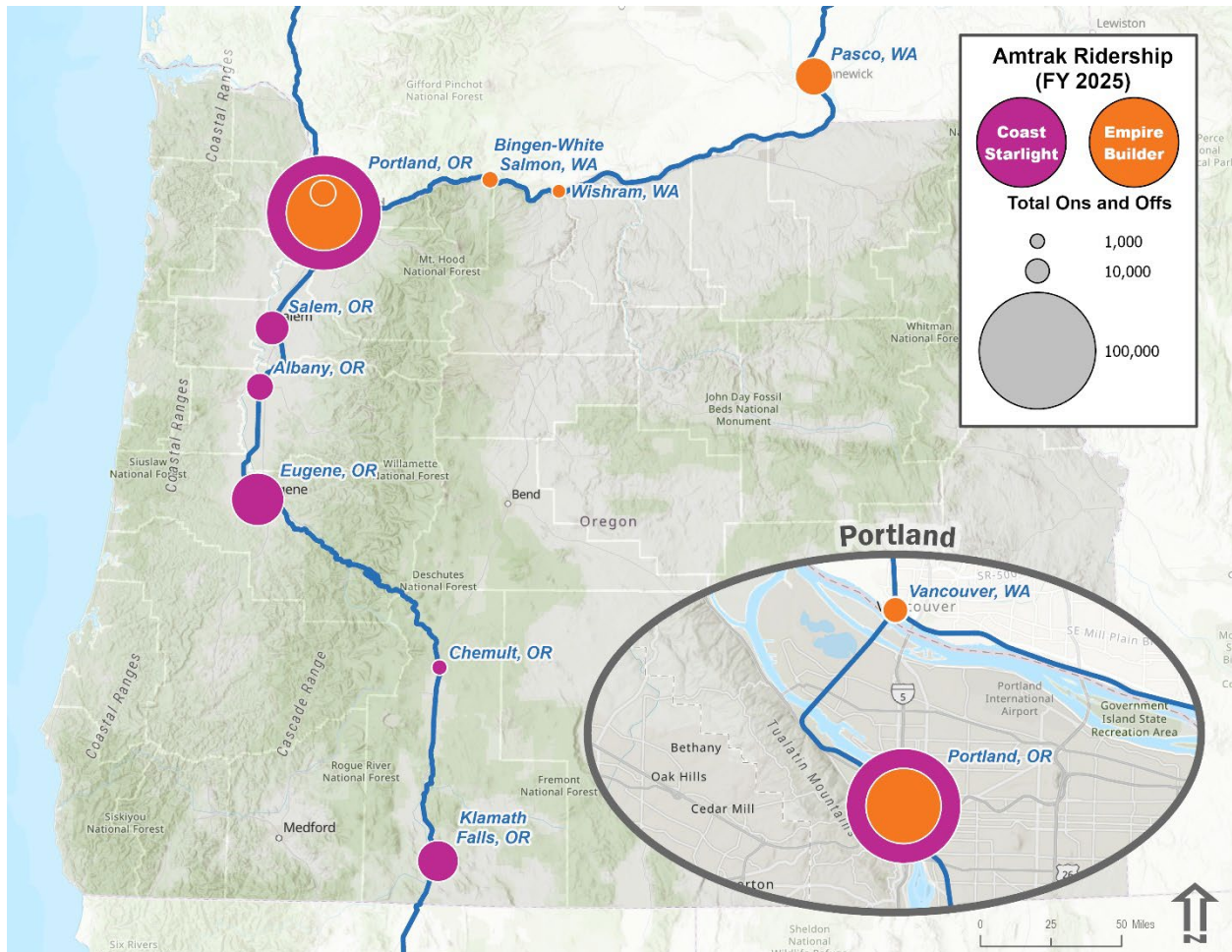


Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025.

As shown in **Figure 8** Amtrak Coast Starlight and Empire Builder passenger boardings at stations in and near Oregon vary and can be disproportionately high compared to the station city population, as in Klamath Falls, OR (ridership in FY 2024 was 29,731; the population of

Klamath Falls is about 21,000) and in Chemult, OR (ridership in FY 2024 was 2,770; the population of Chemult is about 120).

**Figure 8. Coast Starlight and Empire Builder Station Boardings in the Pacific Northwest**



Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025.

### 3.3.2 On-time Performance

The Coast Starlight customer OTP averaged 56 percent during FY 2024, below the 80 percent standard for endpoint OTP established by FRA.

The Empire Builder failed to meet endpoint OTP standards during the same period. Customer OTP during FY 2023 was approximately 55 percent.

### 3.3.3 Delays

In FY 2024, the last available year with complete data, the Coast Starlight failed to meet the PRIIA-recommended service delay performance targets for most quarters reported. The top causes of host-responsible delays were delays from freight trains and temporary slow orders. The most frequent Amtrak-responsible delays were issues with passengers or crew, and system-related delays.



In FY 2024, the last available year with complete data, the Empire Builder failed to meet the PRIIA-recommended service delay performance targets for most quarters reported. The top causes of host-responsible delays were the same as the Coast Starlight: delays from freight trains and temporary slow orders. The most frequent Amtrak-responsible delays were connections with other trains or buses and passenger-related delays.

### **3.3.4 Challenges**

Long-distance train services like the Empire Builder and the Coast Starlight are the responsibility of Amtrak and the federal government. Therefore, Oregon's involvement and influence in the provision of these services are quite limited. Nevertheless, the presence of these long-distance train services forms an important part of the passenger rail system in Oregon and nationwide. These trains provide national connectivity and associated long-distance travel benefits and bring ridership to the state-supported Amtrak Cascades service. Furthermore, the Coast Starlight provides an additional frequency along the Amtrak Cascades corridor at no cost to the state, which makes the overall service along the corridor more attractive to passengers.

The most immediate concerns affecting both the Empire Builder and the Coast Starlight are: service availability (given the short trains with fewer cars and ensuing high prices), and service reliability (given the poor OTP). Longer term, several issues will limit potential growth and viability. The single daily frequencies limit travel options and thus the pool of potential users. Amtrak's fleet of long-distance cars has been static and aging, with the original Superliner fleet dating to the late 1970s, and is overdue for replacement.

## **3.4 Safety and Security of Passenger Rail**

Ensuring the safety and security of the passenger rail system is of the highest priority. In addition to providing for the welfare of passengers, a safe and secure system has the added benefit of retaining ridership and ensuring efficient operations. Rail-related incidents resulting in injuries and fatalities—which often result in substantial delays to passenger trains—are most commonly associated with grade crossing conflicts and trespassing on railroad property. In passenger operations, most injuries are associated with slips and falls at stations and on moving equipment. In most instances, these are minor.

Typically, issues with safety are addressed through a combination of physical improvements and education. Physical improvements include crossing gates and active warning systems at grade crossings, installation of fencing and other barriers to prevent incursions on the right of way, track and signal improvements, and grade separations that eliminate at-grade crossings of rail lines and roadways. The rail industry has had a long-standing educational campaign through Operation Lifesaver that is designed to educate the public about the risks of trespassing on railroad property and the importance of using caution around railroad tracks and trains.

**Table 3** presents all Oregon highway-rail crossing incidents and fatalities for Amtrak between 2020 and 2025.

**Table 3. FRA Highway-Rail Crossing Incidents and Fatalities: Amtrak 2020–2025**

Highway User		Total	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
<b>Total</b>	Incidents	19	5	2	3	1	7	1
	Fatalities	8	2	1	1	0	4	0
	Injuries	4	1	0	1	0	2	0
<b>Pedestrian</b>	Incidents	8	2	1	2		3	
	Fatalities	6	1	1	1		3	
	Injuries	1	0	0	1		0	
<b>Auto</b>	Incidents	4	1	1			1	1
	Fatalities	2	1	0			1	0
	Injuries	0	0	0			0	0
<b>Other Motor Vehicle</b>	Incidents	2	2					
	Fatalities	0	0					
	Injuries	1	1					
<b>Other</b>	Incidents	2					2	
	Fatalities	0					0	
	Injuries	2					2	
<b>Van</b>	Incidents	1					1	
	Fatalities	0					0	
	Injuries	0					0	
<b>Truck-trailer</b>	Incidents	1				1		
	Fatalities	0				0		
	Injuries	0				0		
<b>Truck</b>	Incidents	1			1			
	Fatalities	0			0			
	Injuries	0			0			



### 3.5 Commuter Rail – Westside Express Service

Commuter rail systems primarily serve recurring travel demand associated with work, school and other activities within a metropolitan region and focus on peak-period services. The Westside Express Service (WES), as shown in **Figure 9**, is Oregon’s only commuter rail service and has served the Portland metropolitan area since February 2009. WES operates weekday service over a 14.7-mile route, serving five stations: Beaverton, Hall/Nimbus, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville. Weekday frequencies consist of 10 roundtrips, with five roundtrips during the morning and evening commute periods. Trains run every 30 minutes during rush hour, and the travel time between Beaverton and Wilsonville is just under 30 minutes.

WES is operated by the Portland & Western Railroad through a purchase of service agreement with Portland’s TriMet (regional transit agency), which funds the service, sets schedules and other standards, and owns the fleet of five self-propelled rail diesel cars and one trailer coach.

WES provides direct connections to Portland’s MAX light rail service. Passengers can transfer from WES commuter rail service to the MAX Red and Blue Lines at the Beaverton Transit Center.

**Figure 10** summarizes passenger boardings and farebox recovery ratios for WES since operations began in 2009. Boarding rides began at about 124,000 in 2009 and peaked at just over 512,000 in 2014. The first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021), however, severely impacted boarding ride numbers, reducing them to about 84,000. Since the pandemic, boarding numbers have rebounded only to about 116,000, which is far below the numbers seen at the line’s inception.

Fare recovery ratio trends have followed a similar trajectory. The fare recovery ratio began about 4.6 percent at inception and grew to its highest point (8.9 percent) in 2014. Since 2014, the fare recovery ratio has decreased steadily, heavily influenced by the drop in ridership due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The ratio has been less than 1.0 percent since 2021. This drop in commuter rail ridership is not unique to WES: Commuter rail ridership has dropped significantly across the United States. Many commuter rail services are now looking to a number of options<sup>6</sup> to increase ridership:

- Expanding service hours beyond traditional commuting hours.
- Offering free fares and flexible passes for certain passengers, such as “youth passes.”
- Adding new stations and shuttle bus service to help passengers reach popular destinations beyond the rail line, such as nearby sports arenas or airports.
- Using feedback to strategically expand and adapt service based on community needs.

---

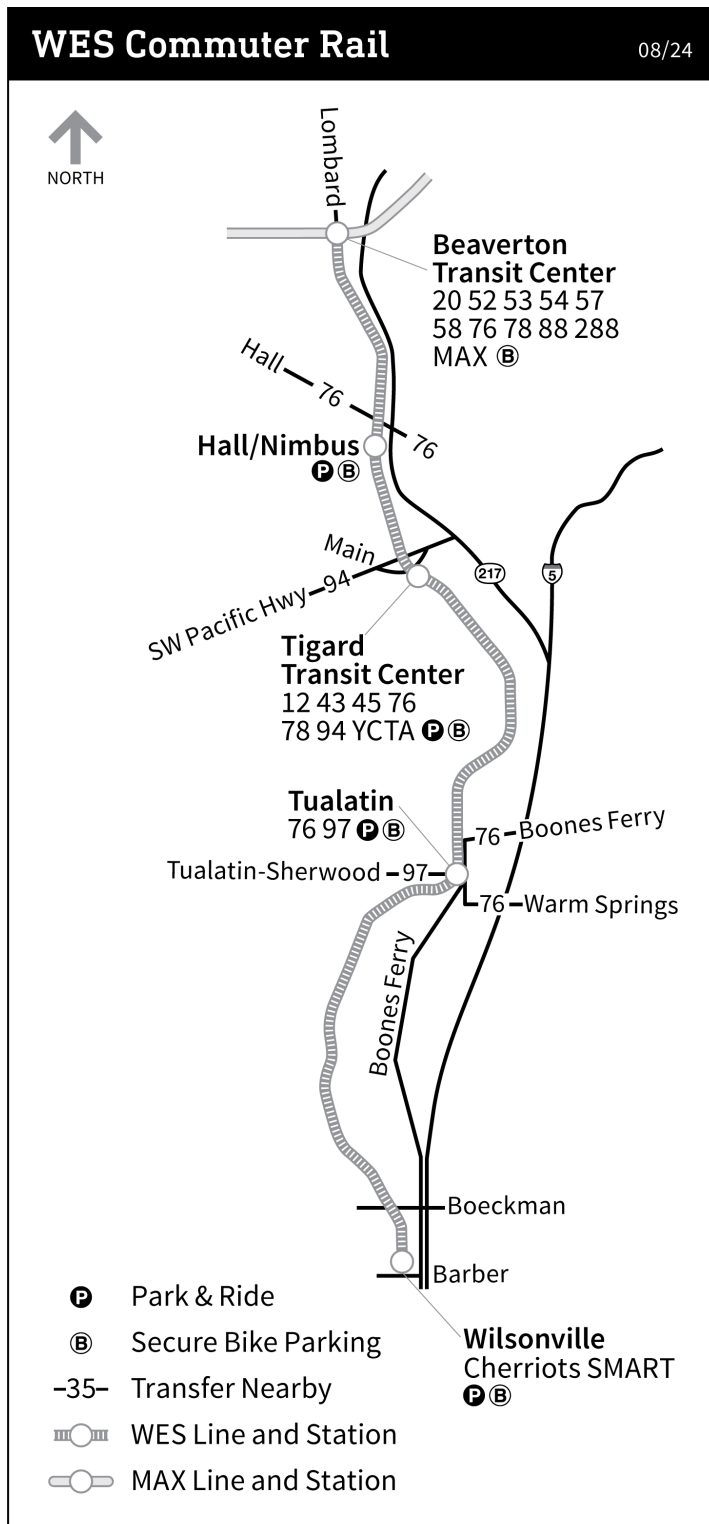
<sup>6</sup> U.S. Government Accounting Office. *Most Commuter Rail Systems Are Still Struggling Post-Pandemic*, May 8, 2025.

**Table 4** presents the highway-rail crossing incidents for WES from 2020 to 2025. There was only one incident in 2020, no other incidents in 2021-2025.

**Table 4. FRA Highway-Rail Crossing Incidents and Fatalities for Westside Express Service for 2020-2025**

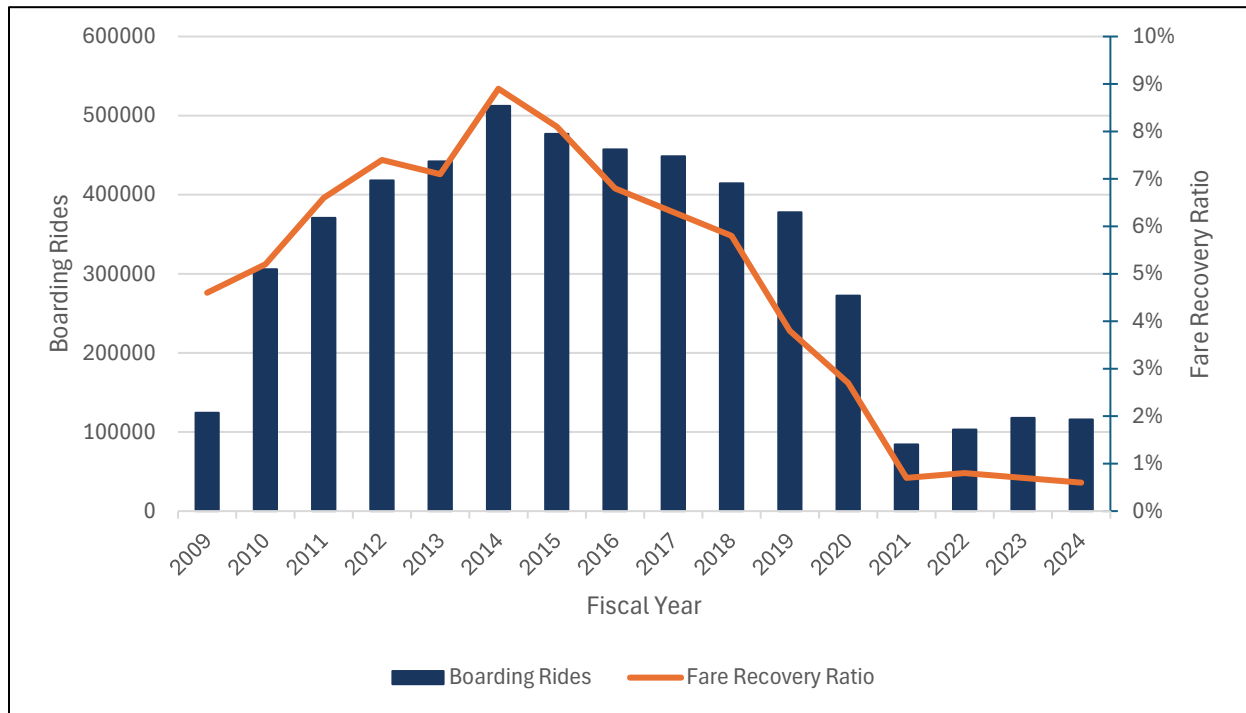
Highway User		Total	2020
Total – All Highway Users	Incidents	1	1
	Fatalities	0	0
	Injuries	0	0
Truck	Incidents	1	1
	Fatalities	0	0
	Injuries	0	0

Figure 9. TriMet Map: WES



Source: TriMet, 2025.

**Figure 10: WES Ridership and Fare Recovery Ratios (FY 2009-FY 2024)**



Source: TriMet, 2025.