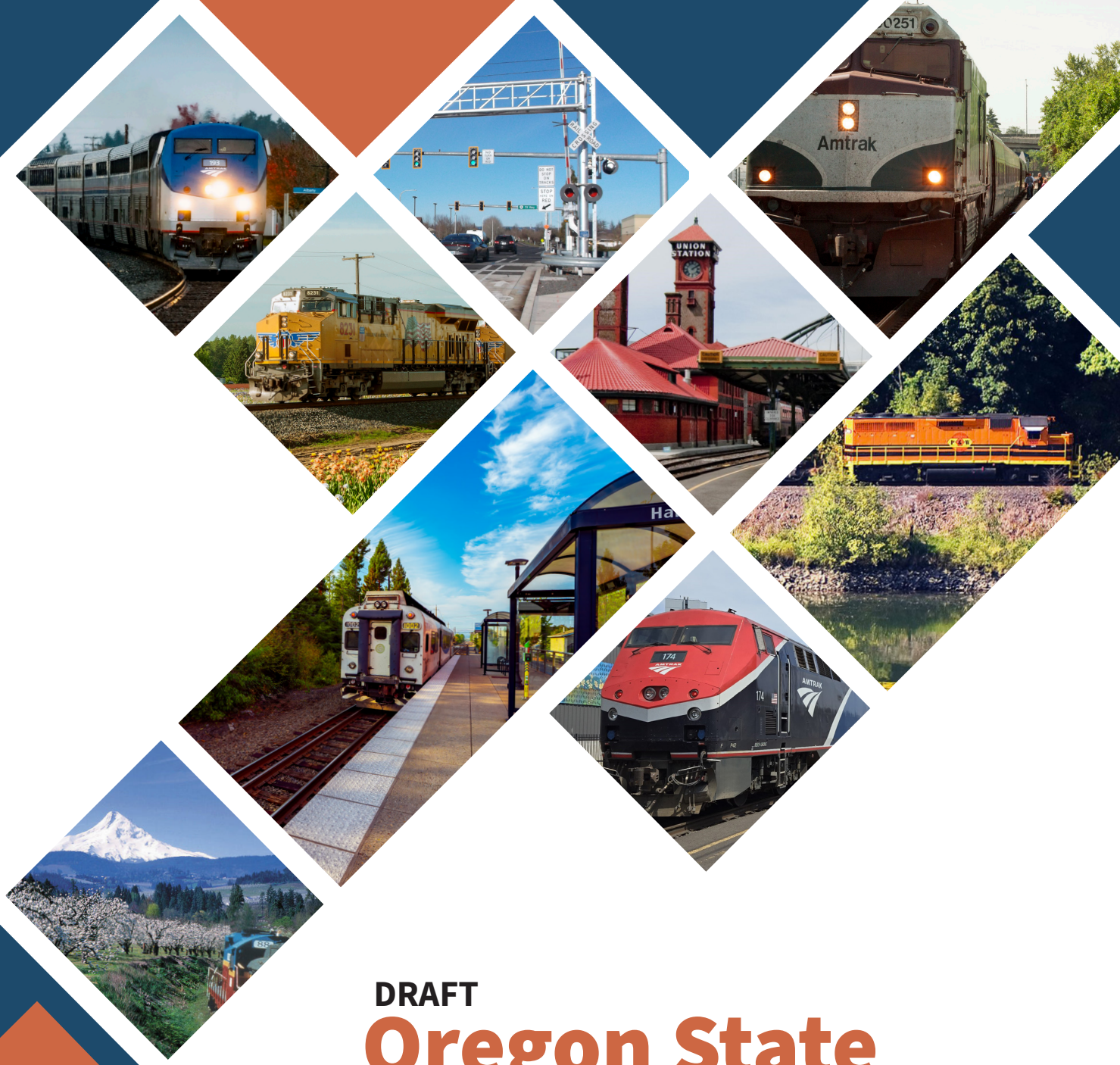

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Oregon State Rail Plan 2027

SEPTEMBER 2026

Oregon Department of Transportation

OREGON STATE RAIL PLAN

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Executive Summary

A word about this Rail Plan

Per Federal Railroad Administration Guidance,[1] a State Rail Plan sets forth Oregon State policy involving rail transportation, presents priorities and strategies to enhance rail service in Oregon, and serves as the basis for federal and state investments within Oregon. A major outcome of this plan is a concise Rail Needs Inventory (Appendix C) which outlines a list of discrete projects where public dollars would substantially improve Oregon's rail system and all users who interact with it.

ES.1 Rail's importance to Oregon

Oregon's rail system is predominantly owned by private railroads hosting freight and passenger rail services that are essential components of the state's multimodal transportation network. Oregon will not achieve its overarching transportation policy goals regarding safety, equity, and climate without its rail system. Through private and public sector collaboration, Oregon has a vested interest in proactively planning for and investing in the rail system's future. Oregon's residents and businesses already benefit from the many advantages freight and passenger rail services provide, given that:

- **The rail system makes Oregon's transportation system safer.** If more tons are shipped and passengers ride Oregon's rail network, fewer incidents will occur per mile of travel across Oregon's transportation system. On a ton-mile basis, freight rail is approximately five times safer than truck transportation.[2] Passenger rail is approximately 28 times safer than motor vehicle travel[3], and is among the safest modes of ground transportation in the United States – and about half of passengers aboard trains in Oregon would otherwise be driving.
- **The rail system is a significant conduit for economic and job activity.** The Office of Economic Analysis estimates that Oregon is the sixth most trade-dependent state in the nation.[4] Over a third of Oregon's economy is based on goods movement-dependent industries, such as timber, wood products and paper; agriculture; manufacturing; construction; and wholesale and retail trade. Intercity passenger rail connects job markets, recreation, and tourism centers throughout the state to support local economies. More than half of Amtrak passengers in Oregon are visitors from out of state, and over 12 percent of them would not travel if rail service were not available.[5]
- **The rail system improves connections for people and goods.** Passenger and freight rail systems in Oregon connect people and goods within the state and across the United States, Mexico, and Canada. It connects to Oregon ports that import and export goods

[1] State Rail Plan Guidance, https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/planning/state-rail-plan-guidance

[2] See section 3.1.1.1

[3] Ibid.

[4] Oregon Office of Economic Analysis. Tariff Impact Report June 2026 https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Documents/Tariff-Impact-Report-2026.pdf

[5] Amtrak Oregon State Economic Impact Brochure: https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/stateeconomicimpactbrochures/Oregon-fy16.pdf

between international markets – 7.6 million annual tons of intermodal shipments originate and terminate in Oregon via the state's rail system.[6] **Figure ES-1** shows a Union Pacific intermodal train in Oregon.

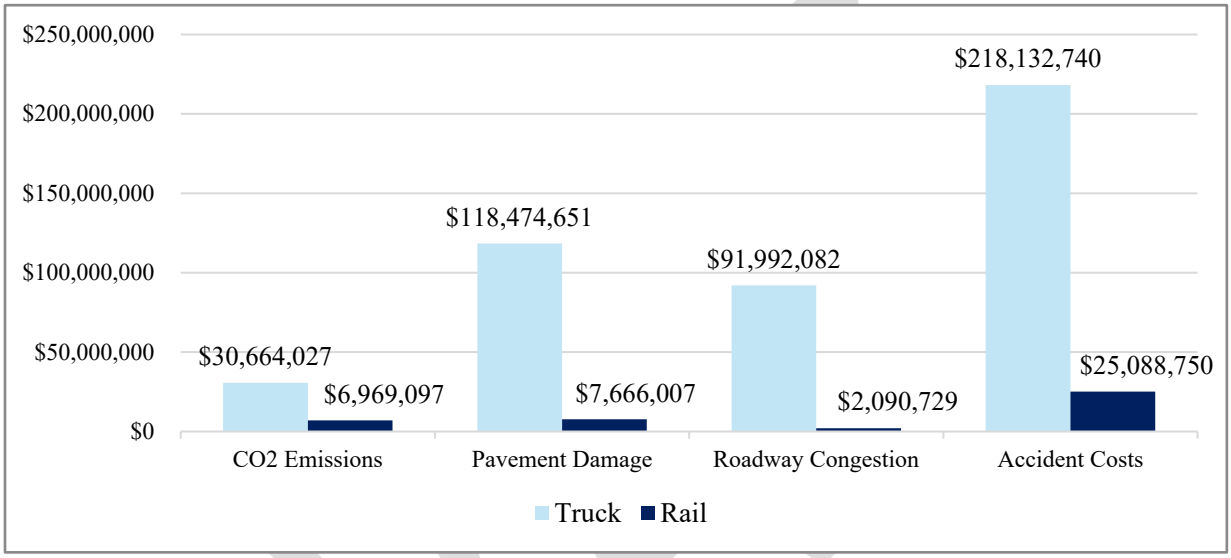
- **The rail system provides mode choice, relieves congestion, and reduces highway maintenance costs.** Both freight and passenger rail systems provide transportation options for users. By offering travel options, transportation costs are lowered. Likewise, removing vehicles from highways brings positive impacts including congestion mitigation, improved safety, fewer emissions, and decreased wear and tear on the highway system, lowering long-term roadway maintenance costs.
- **Use of rail contributes positively to the environment.** Rail is the most efficient and least impactful mode of land transportation in terms of energy consumption for moving both people and goods. Reducing energy consumption leads to a reduction in emissions, helping to meet Oregon's climate goals.
- **When coordinated, rail enhances sustainability and community vitality.** Through integration of rail networks and land use planning, community vitality is enhanced. Passenger and commuter rail supports the development of livable communities, provides travel options, and spurs economic opportunities at station locations. Preservation of rail corridors ensures that economic development opportunities can be realized in the future.

Figure ES-1. A Union Pacific Railroad intermodal train in the Willamette Valley

[6] See Figure 3-22, Section 3.2.2.6

Each mode of transportation has strengths and weaknesses relative to each other. This rail plan includes a comparative analysis of trucks and trains in the context of moving freight in Oregon. This analysis shows that moving more freight by rail, instead of heavy roadway vehicles, will reduce public costs in Oregon. These public costs include highway maintenance, accidents, pollution, and congestion time. If only 10 percent of existing annual truck ton-miles were moved to rail, Oregon could save up to $460 million annually in public costs, and their associated burden on taxpayers as shown on **Figure ES-2**.

Figure ES-2. Annual public costs of 10 percent of annual Oregon truck ton-miles, by truck and rail



In order to realize the full range of benefits a transportation system that integrates passenger and freight rail provides, the State of Oregon will continue to actively partner with regional and local governments and private rail companies to proactively plan and explore investments to make the rail system in Oregon better by working together.

ES.2 Oregon State Rail Plan vision statement and goals

The Oregon State Rail Plan establishes a vision statement that is forward-looking to shape the future of the rail system in Oregon and ensure the beneficial outcomes of rail are realized.

Oregon will have a safe, efficient, and commercially viable rail system that serves its businesses, travelers and communities through private resources leveraged, as needed, by strategic public investments.

The vision is carried out through the State Rail Plan's goals, policies, and strategies.[7] Seven goals have been developed for the Oregon State Rail Plan:

- **Goal 1 - Partnership, Collaboration and Communication**

  Partner, collaborate, and communicate with rail system operators and other stakeholders to maximize benefits, align interests, remove barriers, and bring innovative solutions to the rail system and foster public understanding of rail's importance.

- **Goal 2 - Connected System**

  Promote, preserve, and enhance an efficient rail system that is accessible for all Oregonians and integrated with Oregon's overall multimodal transportation system.

- **Goal 3 - System Stewardship**

  Enhance transportation system reliability, capacity, frequency, and travel times through investments that preserve and improve freight and passenger rail assets and infrastructure.

- **Goal 4 - Funding, Finance and Investment Principles**

  Establish funding that meets the critical needs of the rail system in Oregon and achieves the objectives of this State Rail Plan.

- **Goal 5 - System Safety**
  Plan, construct, operate, maintain, and coordinate the rail system in Oregon with safety and security for all users, rail workers, and communities as a top priority.

- **Goal 6 - Sustainability and Community Vitality**

  Increase use and investment in freight and passenger rail systems to meet Oregon's goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improve Oregon's natural environment and support thriving communities.

- **Goal 7 - Economic Development**

  Increase opportunity and investment in freight and passenger rail assets to grow Oregon's economy.

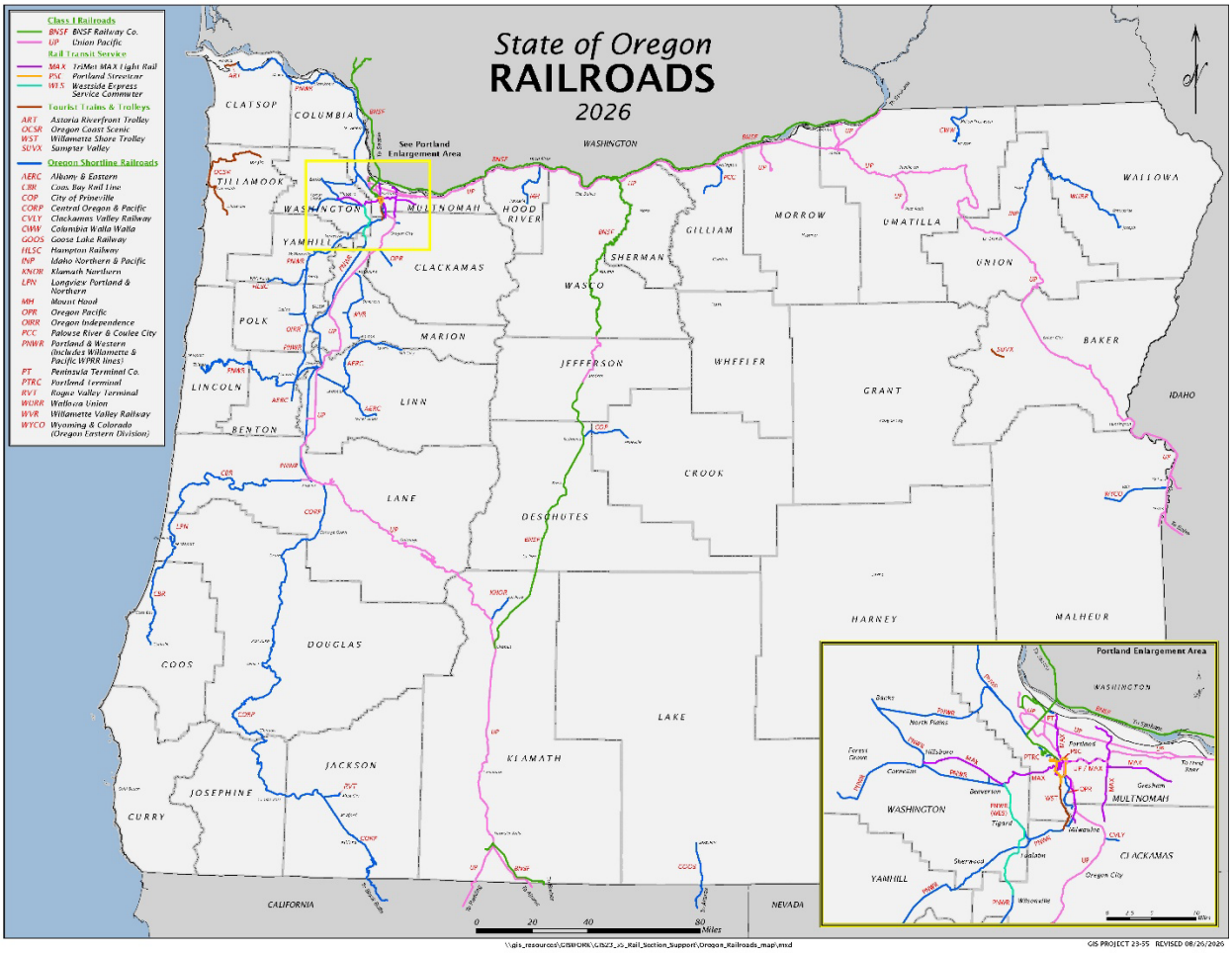
ES.3 Freight and passenger rail system in Oregon

ES.3.1 Freight rail system

Oregon's freight rail system is part of a nationwide, interconnected network of rail infrastructure and services that link the state to the rest of North America, as well as the world, through international ports. The infrastructure supporting these services in Oregon is substantial and includes various carload and intermodal facilities, along with tunnels and bridges. The Federal Railroad Administration classifies freight railroads by gross income. In 2027, freight railroads in Oregon consist of two Class I railroads, which earn approximately over $1 Billion in revenue annually, and 23 Class III railroads, which make less than $50 Million in revenue annually (**Figure ES-3**).

[7] See Chapter 4

Figure ES-3. Rail system in Oregon



Source: ODOT 2026.

Class I railroads in Oregon, Union Pacific and BNSF Railway, together operate 47 percent of all active rail mileage in the state. They handle the vast majority of freight traffic, including virtually all interstate shipments, and host all Amtrak passenger service. Combined, the two railroads employed approximately 1,337 people and handled over 720,000 carloads that had either an origin or destination in Oregon in 2023. One railroad carload can equal over three truckloads of freight.[8] In addition, both railroads handled a substantial volume of through traffic.

While they are the primary arteries for the movement of goods throughout the state, non-Class I railroads also provide important collector/distributor services for the larger railroads and local rail services for shippers. In Oregon, non-Class I rail lines were primarily built to support the extraction of forest products in the western part of the state. Notably, these include what are now the third and fourth largest railroads in Oregon in terms of mileage and gross revenues, the Portland & Western (which includes sister company Willamette & Pacific) and Central Oregon

[8] Truckloads are largely capped at 80,000 pounds, or about 40 tons. Single railcars are largely capped at 286,000 pounds, or 143 tons, over three and a half times the truck weight rating.

& Pacific. Together, these railroads operate 56 percent of total non-Class I railroad mileage and generate about 80 percent of non-Class I total revenue while hauling over 92,000 annual carloads.

ES.3.2 Rail line abandonments and preservation

Preservation of rail infrastructure and right-of-way is a major issue addressed in this Plan. In the wake of deregulation in 1980, railroads moved to improve their financial performance by selling or abandoning lines with poor prospects. While the most marginal lines were abandoned, many were sold or leased to non-Class I line operators.

In Oregon, line abandonments have been driven by multiple factors, including high capital costs, lack of customer diversity, and changing economies. At present, roughly 315 miles of track in Oregon are presently at risk of abandonment.[9] The abandonment of rail lines often results in the permanent loss of important transportation assets that could provide future benefits as part of an overall economic development strategy targeted at rail-served industries or services. There are substantial public benefits to maintaining and increasing rail freight on these lines.

ES.3.3 Passenger rail system

Passenger rail serves a variety of mobility needs. These include urban transit in the Portland metropolitan region, intercity services linking Pacific Northwest metropolitan areas, and long-distance services connecting the state with other United States regions. In the Portland region, rail transit services are provided through a network of electrically powered MAX light rail and streetcar lines and a single commuter line. The light rail and streetcar lines operate separately from the mainline railway network and are not included in this State Rail Plan. Commuter, intercity, and long-distance services, including Tri-Met's Westside Express Service commuter line and Amtrak short-distance and long-distance services serving the state, all operate over the national rail network and are the focus of this State Rail Plan.[10]

Federal law classifies intercity passenger rail services into two types: routes exceeding 750 miles in length are long distance, while those less than 750 miles in length are short-distance corridors.[11] For the long-distance services, Amtrak bears full responsibility for their operation, with costs covered by a combination of fare revenues and federal support. Oregon is fortunate to have service from two such routes, the *Coast Starlight*, and *Empire Builder*. However, states and local communities, including Oregon, 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 fully shifted financial responsibility to states (or other local sponsors).

---

[9] See Table 3-4 within Section 3.2.4.4

[10] In addition to regularly scheduled services, Oregon hosts several passenger operations whose primary purpose is preservation of historic railroad artifacts and recreation. Typically, these tourist services operate seasonally and on weekends over dedicated or branch lines with modest freight traffic. These railroads are classified in the context of their freight operations in this Plan.

[11] Section 24102(5)(C) and (D) of 49 USC.

Developing a long-term funding strategy while continuing to improve and expand state-sponsored Amtrak Cascades service is another critical issue addressed in this Plan.

Amtrak operates three routes in Oregon (**Figure ES-4**):

Figure ES-4. Oregon intercity passenger rail network

Source: ODOT Geographic Information Services, 2019.

- ***Empire Builder*: Amtrak long-distance train that links Chicago with Portland and Seattle.** Operating daily over 2,300 miles, one of the most heavily used Amtrak long-distance train splits in Spokane with separate trains operating to the route's two western termini. Portland is the only stop in Oregon for the *Empire Builder*, though Hood River and The Dalles are functionally in the catchment area of the *Empire Builder's* stops in Bingen-White Salmon, Washington, and Wishram, Washington, just on the other side of the Columbia River.
- ***Coast Starlight*: Amtrak long-distance train that links Los Angeles with Seattle via Oakland, and Portland.** Operating daily over 1,300 miles from Los Angeles to Seattle, is among the most popular long-distance trains in the Amtrak system. The Coast Starlight provides the only passenger rail service to Chemult and Klamath Falls in Southern Oregon.
- **Amtrak Cascades: a multifrequency daily intercity service, which travels about 461 miles between Eugene and Vancouver, British Columbia**. In Oregon, Amtrak Cascades serves the Willamette Valley with stops at 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.

ES.4 Rail system needs and opportunities

ES.4.1 Class I needs

BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad are in very good condition in the state of Oregon. All trackage in Oregon is capable of carrying industry standard 286,000-pound (commonly referred to as 286K) freight rail cars. All but about 40 miles of the Oregon Trunk Line, through Central Oregon, has Centralized Traffic Control and is cleared for double-stacked containers. As demand for rail services grows in the future, the freight rail system will require further investments to accommodate that growth.

Capacity constraints for Class I freight railroads tend to be related to issues that limit the fluid movement of trains, such as congestion in terminal areas or sidings limiting the lengths of trains which can use them. Most projects in the Rail Needs Inventory[12] located on tracks operated by BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad are related to yard fluidity improvements, such as installation of power switches, extension of yard leads and sidings to reduce interference between switching and main line train movements, and at-grade crossings, especially in terminal areas

In general, responsibility for adapting to increasing freight traffic falls on the railroads. Railroads take a variety of actions to respond to changing freight demands that include operational changes, marketing adjustments, and capital improvements. If growth is expected to be sustainable, then physical improvements will be considered, with the improvements having the lowest cost typically implemented first.

However, where there is public benefit, or direct public interface, such as at-grade crossings, public sector involvement can be warranted. This is especially true of passenger rail services, which is limited by the need for locations for passenger trains to meet and pass freight trains. This is directly related to the terminal and siding constraints experienced by Class I railroads, thus addressing these issues can create mutual capacity benefits between passenger and freight rail services.

ES.4.2 Class III Railroad needs

Short line capacity tends to be constrained by the condition of the infrastructure over which the railroad operates. Poor quality track and structures, such as bridges and tunnels, can pose problems for these railroads, as the high costs to maintain these assets in already poor condition can result in further deferral of maintenance in favor of speed and weight restrictions. These needs are exemplified in the Rail Needs Inventory[13] by the over 20 projects related to rail and turnout replacement and nine projects related to bridge rehabilitation/modernization located on short line railroads.

Traditionally the major operational issues facing railroads include speed, weight, and vertical clearance restrictions often caused by bridges and tunnels. These issues are most prominent with Class III railroads in Oregon, and often their inability to accommodate heavier and/or larger

[12] See Rail Needs Inventory, Appendix 3

[13] See Rail Needs Inventory, Appendix 3

freight equipment affects their financial performance, limits their growth, and sometimes threatens their existence. Over 250 miles of Class III rail lines in Oregon cannot accommodate 286,000-pound loads, placing the shippers on those lines at an economic disadvantage because they are unable to fully exploit many of the efficiencies of rail.

Several elements characterize and differentiate the needs of short line railroads from their Class I relatives. Some key indicators of need include:

- **Percent of mileage that is 286,000-pound capable.** Rail lines that cannot handle 286,000-pound freight cars limit a railroad's ability to serve certain types of loads and connect to Class I railroads.
- **Percent of mileage that is Federal Railroad Administration Class 2+ Track.**[14] Track class impacts a railroad's ability to handle certain types of loads and to achieve higher speed delivery. Portions of rail lines that do not meet Class 2 standards (25-mph operating speed) can be costly to operate and not market competitive, particularly in attracting new business.
- **Percent of mileage that uses 110-pound rail.** Rail with a weight of at least 110 pounds per yard is considered the minimum weight over which loaded 286K railcars can be sustainably accommodated. While lighter weight rail can handle 286K railcars, it is at the cost of greatly increased maintenance and impaired operations.
- **Number of bridges in poor condition.** The overall condition and suitability of a rail line to carry loads directly relates to the ability of bridges on the line to carry loads. Should these bridges not be improved, they will eventually impair the line's long-term viability.
- **Number of carloads.** Traffic volumes provide an indication of a railroad's utility under present conditions, insight into future needs, and impacts of potential investments or other changes.
- **At-risk segments.** At-risk rail lines are identified in Chapter 3 by linking information about system condition, volume, and vulnerability of a line to determine if future investments are warranted.

It is important to recognize that the issues faced by short line railroads are not homogeneous. Larger Class III railroads, such as Portland & Western Railroad, Willamette & Pacific Railroad, and Albany and Eastern Railway (**Figure ES-5**), in general, have better track conditions than other Class III railroads. Many smaller railroads, however, face far greater challenges with some lines having deficient infrastructure.

[14] See Table 2-1 in Chapter 2

Figure ES-5. An Albany and Eastern train in the Willamette Valley

Rail line condition is closely linked to the number of carloads on the line; lines in better condition are likely to attract more customers, and the revenue in turn can justify investments to improve the lines. Lines that are in poor condition also have low carload volumes, or no volumes in some cases.

ES.4.3 Passenger rail service needs

ES.4.3.1 Challenges to improving Amtrak Cascades service

Achieving the full potential for the Amtrak Cascades corridor will require addressing three key constraints: 1) travel times and reliability, 2) frequency, and 3) connectivity.

1. **Travel times and reliability.** Increased traffic congestion on the I-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.
2. **Frequency.** The present two round trips (three including the *Coast Starlight*) between Eugene and Portland do not provide sufficient schedule flexibility for many travelers. A service development plan approved by the Federal Railroad Administration in 2021 identified a preferred alternative of six round trips between Eugene and Portland to better accommodate that travel market.
3. **Connectivity.** Improving access to and from stations and public transportation system connectivity can lower the overall time and effort required to use the service, expand travel options for travelers, and leverage economic impacts in communities. Some of Oregon's

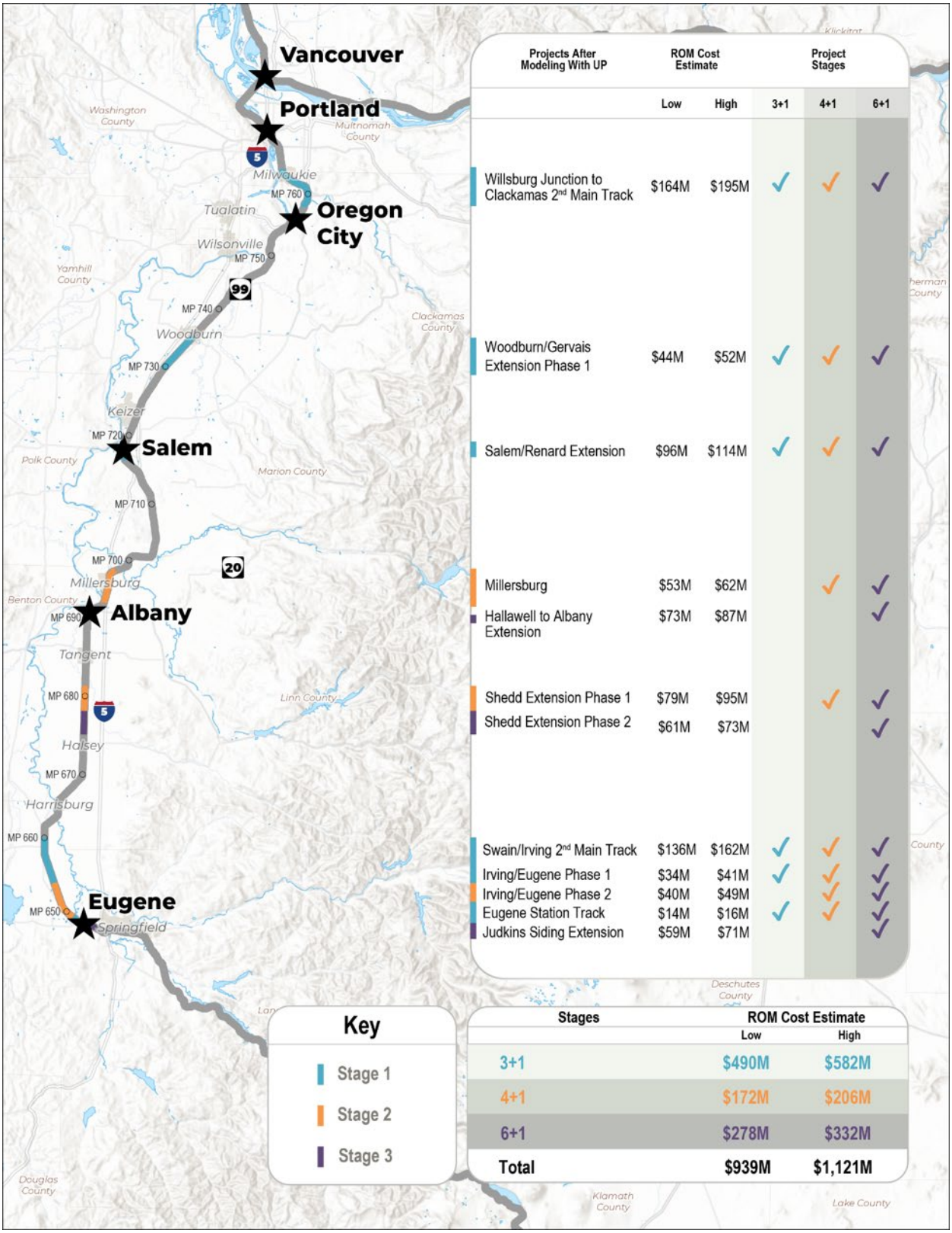
intercity passenger rail stations have substantial infrastructure needs. Notably, this includes Portland Union Station, shown in **Figure ES-6**, which needs significant platform improvements and seismic upgrades.

Figure ES-6. Portland's iconic Union Station

To address these challenges, an extensive capacity modeling process was performed as part of Oregon's Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan involving ODOT, Amtrak, Union Pacific Railroad, and the Federal Railroad Administration. This process produced a set of capital investments that would enable up to six daily round trips between Eugene and Portland. The locations and details of the prioritized projects resulting from this process are shown in **Figure ES-7.** All listed costs are expected to be shared on an eighty percent/twenty percent basis respectively between the Federal Railroad Administration and Oregon.

The primary capacity concern identified through this process was regarding conflicts between passenger trains and local Union Pacific freight trains. The resulting projects create significant mutual benefits between passenger and freight rail and lay the groundwork for the expansion of passenger and freight rail traffic in the Willamette Valley corridor.

Figure ES-7. Amtrak Cascades priority projects



ES.4.3.2 Oregon's funding and financing authority

The two primary federal funders are the Federal Railroad Administration and the Federal Transit Administration. The details of these funding sources are described in Chapter 4. Other federal sources, such as the numerous grant programs introduced by the 2021 Surface Transportation Reauthorization, may provide significant dollars towards rail projects and are also described.

The State of Oregon has used legislative opportunities to fund rail improvements. These include sources such as the Connect Oregon program, the State Rail Rehabilitation Fund, and custom vehicle license plate fees. Programs established by prior legislation, as well as other state sources, are also described in Chapter 4.

ES.4.3.3 Rail funding shortfall and challenges

While there are a number of funding sources that may be used to fund rail projects, Oregon currently lacks sufficient dedicated, sustainable funding requisite for passenger and freight rail investments in the state. Without increases in funding, Oregon does not have revenue available, nor does it reliably have the required federal match, to improve, maintain, and operate passenger rail services while supporting the state's freight rail network where appropriate.[15]

ES.5 Oregon's rail service and investment program

A full accounting of currently statewide identified rail infrastructure needs is found in the Oregon Rail Needs Inventory included as Appendix C. This continuously evolving list of capital projects was developed to help prioritize rail capital investments and to record a list of capital projects for potential implementation on Oregon's rail network. A key feature of the Rail Needs Inventory is that project submissions are made by many different entities, from the railroads themselves to public entities, such as cities, through a publicly accessible form.[16]

ES.5.1 Evaluation factors

To inform decisions on which rail projects to prioritize for investment, ODOT developed a set of evaluation factors and criteria in 2022. Evaluation factors represent broad categories of project value, while evaluation criteria define the measurable characteristics used to assess performance for each factor.

The Oregon Transportation Plan and Oregon State Rail Plan serve as the state's primary policy frameworks for guiding long-term transportation investment decisions, while the Strategic Action Plan informs near-term investment priorities. Within this framework, evaluation factors and criteria ensure consistency with statewide goals, by considering:

- Consistency with the State Rail Plan's key themes, including mobility, economic vitality, environmental sustainability, community and safety, good stewardship, and strong partnerships.
- System performance priorities that are most important to Oregon's shippers, ports, passengers, and communities, including multimodal connectivity.

[15] The Passenger Rail Program continuously works to secure funding.

[16] https://www.oregon.gov/odot/rptd/pages/rail-needs-inventory-form.aspx

The evaluation factors and criteria listed in **Table ES-1** were developed through a collaborative process involving the Oregon Transportation Commission, the Oregon Rail Advisory Committee, a technical advisory committee and an internal project team and including input from stakeholders and consultant partners.

Table ES-1. ODOT rail project evaluation criteria

Factor	Description	Evaluation Criteria
Equity	Consider census areas with high numbers of environmental justice communities and transportation disadvantaged residents	Transportation Disadvantaged Populations Index
		Expanding economic equity
Environment	Consider the physical and built environments that are anticipated because of the project's implementation	Air quality and greenhouse gases
		Natural resources
		Climate and seismic resiliency
		Cultural and historic resources
		Congestion mitigation
Economic	Consider the incremental changes in costs, including local and statewide economic effects, that could occur with the implementation of the project	Shipping costs
		Operating costs
		Regional and local economic impact
Mobility	Consider the improvement that the project will provide to the transportation system, across all modes interacting with the project	Travel time
		Travel reliability
		Capacity improvements
		Multimodal connectivity
Readiness	Consider the project's ability to proceed based on technical documents, owner buy-in/support, permits identified and/or received, regulatory and environmental approvals, known existing or pending funding, political support, and identified required approvals	Funding leverage
		Community support status
		Project development status
		Right-of-way status
Safety	Consider anticipated safety-related improvements and impacts experienced by other transportation users due to project operations	Change in operator and maintenance staff safety
		Change in passenger safety
		Change in road user safety
		Level of stress (active transportation users)

The Rail Needs Inventory evaluation applies a dynamic weighting approach to reflect the priorities of a given funding opportunity. For example, the Federal Railroad Administration's Railroad Crossing Elimination Program emphasizes safety and mobility. Therefore, these factors may be weighed more heavily when identifying competitive projects, while still maintaining alignment with statewide priorities. The hierarchical structure of the framework also supports program-specific screening by evaluating only the relevant project categories (e.g., "Crossing Safety" and "Network Mobility" for railroad crossing elimination projects).

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To support comparison across diverse project types, the framework translates factor-level scores into overall ratings of "high," "medium," or "low." This approach enables consistent comparison while balancing quantitative and qualitative inputs. Quantitative analysis is applied where data are available, such as public benefits relative to cost, whereas qualitative assessment supports the subjective evaluation of factors, such as alignment with statewide goals or identification of potential constraints. This combined approach provides a flexible yet consistent framework for evaluating and prioritizing rail investments across a range of project types, data availability, and diverse funding opportunities.

ES.6 Summary

Rail supports the Oregon Transportation Plan goals by moving freight and passengers in a significantly safer way on average per ton-mile or passenger-mile than competing modes, produces fewer pollutants, reduces demand for road capacity, enhances the state's economic vitality, and reduces road maintenance costs. Consistent investment in rail capacity will advance the goals of the Oregon Transportation Plan. The projects necessary to enable greater rail mode share for passenger and freight transportation have been defined by this State Rail Plan, whether they are from the Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan or identified by other stakeholders through the Rail Needs Inventory (Appendix C). This plan achieved this active list through meaningful partnerships with private railroads, and also through innovative real-time railroad networking technology as reported in Appendix A.

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Chapter 1. The Role of Rail in Oregon

1.1 Introduction

The Oregon State Rail Plan (the State Rail Plan) is an important document for the state because maintaining a current plan that complies with the requirements of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 positions Oregon to compete for federal rail funding. By identifying statewide rail needs, establishing investment priorities and outlining implementation strategies, the State Rail Plan demonstrates that proposed rail investments are part of a coordinated, long-term vision. The State Rail Plan helps ensure that Oregon is well-positioned to pursue future grant opportunities.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of Oregon's multimodal transportation system and planning framework while highlighting the critical role that the rail transportation network serves for residents and businesses. This chapter also summarizes the key federal, state and local stakeholders that play a role in advocating for, planning, funding and operating Oregon's rail system.

1.2 Oregon's transportation goals

The Oregon Transportation Plan, approved by the Oregon Transportation Commission in 2023, establishes the state's long-range transportation policy for moving people and goods and provides the framework for transportation policies and strategies through 2050. State agencies, transportation providers, and regional and local governments are expected to align their plans with the Oregon Transportation Plan.

The State Rail Plan, which is also adopted by the Oregon Transportation Commission, guides ODOT's rail planning and investment decisions. The goals of this State Rail Plan support the direction established in the Oregon Transportation Plan while also providing a rail-specific framework for advancing passenger and freight rail investments. **Figure 1-1** illustrates this alignment between both plans, and Chapter 4 provides further detail.

Figure 1-1. Oregon Transportation Plan and Oregon State Rail Plan Goal Alignment

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1.3 State Rail Plan vision statement and goals

Although Oregon's rail system is predominantly owned by private railroads, it remains a critical component of the state's multimodal transportation network, supporting the movement of both freight and passengers. Public- and private-sector partnership presents a unique opportunity to the state, and Oregon recognizes the value of collaboration between both sectors. Oregon is committed to proactively planning for the future of its rail system to maximize the opportunities freight and passenger rail services provide for residents and businesses. The rail system maximizes these opportunities in the following ways:

- **The rail system is a significant conduit for economic and job activity.** The 2011 Oregon Freight Plan, amended in 2023, estimates that over 31 percent of Oregon's economy is supported by industries that depend on the movement of goods. Rail plays a critical role in serving many of these industries, including timber, wood and paper products, agriculture and food, manufacturing, construction, and wholesale and retail trade.[1] In addition to supporting freight movement, Oregon's rail system also provides important passenger transportation benefits. Efficient and accessible intercity passenger rail connects residents and visitors to job markets, recreation and tourism throughout the state, supporting local economies and improving mobility.
- **The rail system improves connections for people and goods.** Passenger and freight rail are integral components of Oregon's transportation system, connecting people and goods within the state, across the United States and to the rest of North America. Freight rail also provides critical connections to Oregon's ports, facilitating the import and export of goods to international markets.
- **The rail system provides mode choice and relieves congestion.** Freight and passenger rail expand transportation options for residents, businesses and shippers. By offering an alternative mode of transportation, rail can help lower transportation costs for residents and businesses while reducing congestion, improving safety, and decreasing wear and tear on roads and other parts of the transportation system.
- **The rail system contributes positively to the environment.** In general, rail is one of the most fuel-efficient modes of transportation for moving people and goods. Compared with passenger vehicles, trucks and air travel, rail typically consumes less fuel per passenger or ton of freight moved. This greater efficiency helps reduce fuel consumption and its associated emissions, supporting improved air quality and broader environmental goals.
- **The rail system supports livable communities and quality of life.** Passenger and commuter rail provide travel options that improve access to destinations and support economic activity around station areas. Integrating rail and land use planning helps communities maximize these benefits while preparing for future transportation enhancements and economic development opportunities.

[1] Source: Oregon Freight Plan, An Element of the Oregon Transportation Plan (2023), Page 3-3, Table 3.2.

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1.3.1 Oregon State Rail Plan vision statement

The State Rail Plan is guided by a long-term vision that describes the desired future of Oregon's rail transportation system and provides direction for planning and investment decisions. The vision serves as the foundation for the State Rail Plan's goals, policies, strategies and implementation framework. The State Rail Plan's vision statement is:

Oregon will have a safe, efficient, and commercially viable rail system that serves its businesses, travelers and communities through private resources leveraged, as needed, by strategic public investments.

1.3.2 Oregon State Rail Plan goals

The State Rail Plan's vision is translated into action through seven goals, supported by the policies, strategies and implementation framework described throughout this Plan. Each goal is equally important to achieving the State Rail Plan's vision and is stated below in no particular order. The use of numbers is a convenient way to refer to each individual goal. The goals are:

Goal 1 – Partnership, Collaboration and Communication

Goal 2 – Connected System

Goal 3 – System Stewardship

Goal 4 – Funding, Finance and Investment Principles

Goal 5 – System Safety

Goal 6 – Sustainability and Community Vitality

Goal 7 – Economic Development

1.4 Institutional structure of Oregon rail programs

This section describes the agencies involved in rail-related matters at the federal, state and local levels. At the federal level, the United States Department of Transportation provides national transportation policy direction. Within the United States Department of Transportation, the Federal Railroad Administration plays a leading role in rail transportation by working directly with rail carriers and partnering with state and regional jurisdictions on rail planning, safety, oversight and funding.

1.4.1 Federal agencies

In addition to the Federal Railroad Administration, there are several other federal agencies that administer funding for rail-related planning, safety and oversight, as shown in **Figure 1-2**.

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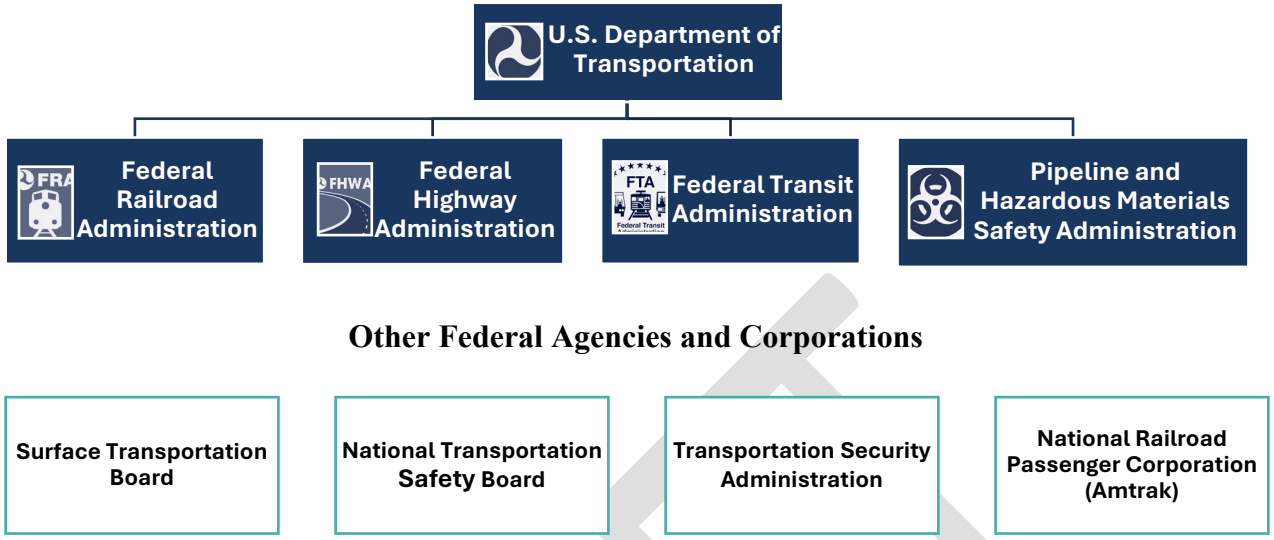
Figure 1-2. Federal Agencies involved in Oregon Freight and Passenger Rail Systems



1.4.1.1 Federal Railroad Administration

The Federal Railroad Administration is the modal agency within the United States Department of Transportation responsible for regulating and promoting the nation's railroad system. The Federal Railroad Administration develops and enforces railroad safety regulations, administers the Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing Program, oversees Amtrak on behalf of the United States Department of Transportation, conducts rail research and manages a variety of rail funding programs, which are described in Chapter 4. The Federal Railroad Administration's funding programs are authorized through legislation, such as the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (fiscal years 2022-2026), which significantly increased federal funding for freight and intercity passenger rail.

Within the Federal Railroad Administration, the Office of Railroad Safety promotes and regulates safety throughout the nation's railroad industry. It employs nearly 400 federal safety inspectors operating from eight regional offices across the country. Federal Railroad Administration inspectors specialize in six safety disciplines: track, operating practices, signal and train control, motive power and equipment, hazardous materials and highway-rail grade crossings. The office also leads grade crossing and trespass prevention initiatives and collects railroad accident and incident data.

Federal Highway Administration

The Federal Highway Administration is the modal agency within the United States Department of Transportation responsible for supporting and overseeing the nation's highway system. For rail-related projects, the Federal Highway Administration administers the Section 130 Railway Highway Crossing Program, which provides dedicated formula funding to improve highway-rail grade crossing safety. Under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, approximately $245 million is available each year during fiscal years 2022-2026 through the Section 130 Railway Highway Crossing Program.

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The Federal Highway Administration assigns each state department of transportation responsibility for administering Section 130 funds within its state. This includes determining where active crossing devices will be installed and assembling the funding needed to complete them. Public agencies are generally responsible for the construction costs associated with installing, upgrading or replacing active crossing devices, while the host railroad is typically responsible for the ongoing operation and maintenance. However, in recent years, more private railroads have required agreements from state or local agencies to share ongoing maintenance costs before approving crossing device upgrades.

Federal Transit Administration

The Federal Transit Administration is the modal agency within the United States Department of Transportation responsible for supporting public transportation systems across the country by providing technical and financial assistance to state and local transit agencies, including commuter rail providers. The Federal Transit Administration administers grant programs that support public transportation investments and oversees grant recipients to ensure programs are managed in accordance with federal statutory and administrative requirements. Unlike intercity passenger rail, where rolling stock is typically funded by states, the Federal Transit Administration can provide financial assistance for commuter rail rolling stock.

Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration

The Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration is the modal agency within the United States Department of Transportation responsible for regulating the safe transportation of hazardous materials. For rail transportation, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration establishes safety requirements for the movement of poison inhalation hazard materials transported in tank cars. In 2009, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration adopted a new regulation that required enhanced safety features and design standards for newly manufactured United States Department of Transportation-specification tank cars. The regulation introduced a 50-mph maximum speed for loaded poison inhalation hazard tank cars and increased the allowable gross weight of tank cars due to the safer design standards.

Surface Transportation Board

The Surface Transportation Board is an independent federal agency responsible for the economic regulation of surface transportation, primarily freight rail. Established in 1996 as the successor to the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Surface Transportation Board became fully independent of the United States Department of Transportation in 2015 following the enactment of the Surface Transportation Board Reauthorization Act. The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 also expanded the Surface Transportation Board's role by authorizing the agency to mediate disputes between passenger rail operators and freight railroads.

The Surface Transportation Board exercises its statutory authority and resolves disputes in support of an efficient, competitive and economically viable surface transportation network that meets the needs of its users. The agency has legal authority to regulate and decide matters involving railroad rates, practices and service issues, as well as rail restructuring transactions, including mergers, line sales, line construction and line abandonments. The Surface Transportation Board is currently reviewing the proposed merger between Union Pacific Railroad and Norfolk Southern Railway. The Board has paused parts of the review process while

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awaiting additional information from the applicants. The Board retains jurisdiction and has not reached a final decision as of the publication of this document.

National Transportation Safety Board

The National Transportation Safety Board is an independent agency responsible for investigating the cause of all transportation accidents and promoting transportation safety. The National Transportation Safety Board is charged with investigating all railroad accidents involving passenger trains or any accident that results in at least one fatality or major property damage. While the National Transportation Safety Board can make recommendations aimed at preventing future accidents, it has no funding or regulatory enforcement authority.

Transportation Security Administration

The Transportation Security Administration, housed within the Department of Homeland Security and in cooperation with the United States Department of Transportation, is responsible for strengthening the security of the nation's transportation systems while ensuring the freedom of movement for people and commerce. As per the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007, the Transportation Security Administration performs established requirements for conducting a nationwide risk assessment of a terrorist attack on railroad carriers and identifying risks to passenger and cargo security. The Act also required the Transportation Security Administration, in coordination with the United States Department of Transportation and other federal agencies, to develop a national strategy for railroad transportation security. As part of this role, the Transportation Security Administration funds security initiatives for freight rail carriers that transport security-sensitive materials through high-threat urban areas.

1.4.2 State and local entities

There are also several state and local entities involved in rail-related planning, operations, maintenance and capital improvement matters.

Oregon Transportation Commission

The Oregon Transportation Commission is a five-member commission appointed by the Governor. Its members are selected to represent diverse geographic regions and perspectives from across Oregon. The Oregon Transportation Commission establishes statewide transportation policy and oversees the management and distribution of state and federal transportation funds.

The commission provides direction for the Oregon Transportation Plan and oversees its implementation within ODOT. However, many parts of the Oregon Transportation Plan are carried out by other agencies and local governments that the commission does not oversee. The commission also formally approves all the state's long-range transportation plans, including this State Rail Plan.

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Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT)

ODOT manages state-owned elements and programs in Oregon's multimodal transportation system. This includes the highway system, passenger rail, public transportation, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and it has overall responsibility for statewide transportation planning. There are several divisions of ODOT that are involved in rail transportation. They are:

- **Policy, Data and Analysis Division**

  The Policy, Data and Analysis Division includes ODOT's Public Transportation Office, which provides grants, policy leadership, training, and technical assistance to local agencies and public transportation provider partners. The Policy, Data and Analysis Division manages the Amtrak Cascades intercity passenger rail service along the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor in partnership with Washington State Department of Transportation. Together, the states fund Amtrak to operate the Amtrak Cascades service between Eugene, Oregon, and Vancouver, British Columbia. Staff provide technical expertise to communities interested in developing rail opportunities and participate in federal proceedings related to railroad mergers and line abandonments.

  The Policy, Data and Analysis Division also collaborates on the development of the State Rail Plan, which is one of several statewide modal plans implemented under the policy direction established by the Oregon Transportation Plan. The Policy, Data and Analysis Division works with its planning partners and Amtrak to implement the State Rail Plan and the Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan. This work involves developing agreements, improving the passenger rail experience and ensuring adequate funding is available to operate the service and maintain and improve infrastructure on the Union Pacific Railroad between Portland and Eugene.

  Oregon Revised Statute 824.420 authorizes ODOT to enter into agreements with the Washington State Department of Transportation and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to develop and operate passenger rail service within the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor between Eugene, Oregon, and Vancouver, British Columbia. The Policy, Data and Analysis Division is also responsible for managing intercity passenger rail operations, publicly funded railroad improvement projects and approximately 150 miles of state-owned railroad right-of-way along the Astoria Line and the Oregon Electric Line.

- **Commerce and Compliance Division**

  The Commerce and Compliance Division has safety authority over all public highway-railroad crossings. Its responsibilities include acting as agent for the Federal Railroad Administration by inspecting track, locomotives, cars, signals, hazardous materials and railroad operating practices; regulating clearances between railroad tracks and adjacent structures, as well as the quality of walkways along railroad tracks to help ensure the safety of railroad employees; and providing state safety oversight for transit agencies with rail-fixed guideway systems, as well as streetcars and trolleys operated by other governmental entities.

Area Commissions on Transportation

Area Commissions on Transportation are advisory bodies chartered by the Oregon Transportation Commission. Area Commissions on Transportation address all aspects of transportation (surface, marine, air and transportation safety) with primary focus on the state transportation system in the area. Area Commissions on Transportation consider regional and

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local transportation issues as they affect the state system. They work with other local organizations dealing with transportation-related issues and have a prominent role in reviewing, prioritizing and recommending investments through the State Transportation Improvement Program. There are currently twelve Area Commissions on Transportation in Oregon.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations

Oregon has eight Metropolitan Planning Organizations serving the Albany area, Bend, Corvallis-Philomath, Eugene-Springfield, Grants Pass, Medford (Rogue Valley), Portland metropolitan region and Salem-Keizer area. Metropolitan Planning Organizations are responsible for developing regional transportation plans and selecting roadway and transit projects within their planning areas. In addition to Metropolitan Planning Organizations, local governments, railroads and private-sector partners all play important roles in Oregon's passenger rail system. For example, several passenger rail stations are owned by local communities, as discussed later in this State Rail Plan.

The Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008

Section 209 of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 significantly changed the funding and management of intercity passenger rail policy in the United States. Key provisions include:

- States or passenger rail authorities became financially responsible for short-distance passenger rail routes, less than 750 miles in length, to encourage states to collaborate and develop regional passenger rail service.
- New standardized performance metrics, including on-time performance, were established to improve accountability and passenger rail service monitoring.
- Amtrak remains financially responsible for long-distance routes greater than 750 miles in length.

Section 209 also established a common methodology for allocating the operating and capital costs of state-supported passenger rail services between Amtrak and participating states. This nationwide standardized methodology, which has been in use since 2013, provides a consistent and transparent approach to determining each state's financial responsibility, including Oregon and Washington's state-supported route that is operated by Amtrak, the Amtrak Cascades. Since Amtrak Cascades is classified as a state-supported corridor service, its operating costs and revenues are allocated between Oregon and Washington in accordance with Section 209 cost allocation methodology, meaning passenger revenues are distributed based on the number of passenger miles traveled within each state's service area, while operating costs are allocated based on the percentage of train miles operated within each state's portion of the corridor. These allocation methods are established through each state's operating agreement with Amtrak.

Washington State Department of Transportation

Washington State Department of Transportation is ODOT's primary partner in planning, funding, and managing the Amtrak Cascades service within the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor. In 2025, ODOT and Washington State Department of Transportation updated their intergovernmental agreement to reflect current roles, responsibilities and cost-sharing arrangements for the service. Washington State Department of Transportation is also preparing

an updated Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan, which will help guide future investments and improvements to passenger rail service throughout the corridor, including service between Portland, Oregon, Union Station and Washington State. ODOT is leading the parallel effort between Portland and Eugene, Oregon.

Cascadia High-Speed Rail

In late 2024, the Federal Railroad Administration awarded the Washington State Department of Transportation $49.7 million in grant funding to advance planning work on the Cascadia high-speed rail program. The states of Oregon and Washington and the Canadian province of British Columbia are coordinating and collaborating on the study of a possible high-speed rail line to connect the metropolitan areas of the Cascadia megaregion, particularly Portland, Seattle and Vancouver, British Columbia — the three largest metropolises.

Union Pacific Railroad and BNSF Railway

Union Pacific is the private, host railroad owner and freight rail service provider for the 124-mile section of Class I railroad over which Amtrak Cascades operates from Eugene north to Portland Union Station.

Similarly, BNSF Railway is the private host railroad over which Amtrak Cascades operates from Union Station to the Oregon-Washington border.

1.5 Compliance statement

Consistent with the intentions of Congress as expressed in the Passenger Rail Investment and Infrastructure Act of 2008, the state of Oregon hereby sets forth its 2027 State Rail Plan as state policy. The State Rail Plan reflects the state's leadership, with public and private transport providers at the state, regional and local levels, to expand and enhance passenger and freight rail and better integrate rail into the broader multimodal transportation system. This State Rail Plan:

- Plans for freight, passenger and commuter rail transportation in the state.
- Describes intended strategies to enhance rail service in the state that benefits the public.
- Establishes an investment framework to be utilized over the period covered by this Plan.
- Serves as the basis for federal and state rail investments within Oregon.

The State Rail Plan was prepared by ODOT, the state rail transportation authority, that will also maintain, coordinate and administer the Plan. The State Rail Plan was approved by the Oregon Transportation Commission on _____ as official state policy.

This State Rail Plan is in compliance with 49 United States Code § 22102 which designates eligibility requirements for a long-established Federal Railroad Administration rail freight grant assistance program pertaining to state planning and administration.

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1.6 Oregon's funding and financing authority

Rail projects, programs and operations are funded by a variety of federal and state sources. The two primary federal sources of funds are the Federal Railroad Administration for the freight rail system, and Federal Transit Administration for the State Safety Oversight Program. There are additional federal sources, such as discretionary grant programs and the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, which have provided significant dollars towards rail projects. Chapter 4 discusses the potential use of these funding mechanisms in the future and historical funding levels, while this section covers an introduction to state funding overall.

1.6.1 State of Oregon funding programs

The state of Oregon has used legislative opportunities to provide funds for rail improvements and has also leveraged private dollars to move essential capital rail projects forward, most notably through the Connect Oregon program. A list of key programs is shown in **Table 1-1**. The Connect Oregon program, as well as other state sources for rail funds, are described in detail in Chapter 4.

Table 1-1. Key Oregon rail and multimodal funding programs

State Funding Program	Funding Source
Connect Oregon Program	Lottery-backed bonds supported by Oregon Lottery revenues/ Privilege and Use Tax authority
State Rehabilitation Fund	State General Fund
Statewide Transportation Fund	Statewide payroll tax
Grade Crossing Protection Account	State Highway Fund and DMV-related revenues
Gross Revenue Fee	Fees paid by railroads carriers operating in Oregon

1.6.1.1 Connect Oregon

Connect Oregon is a competitive grant program created by the Oregon Legislature in 2005, designed to improve connections between the highway system and other modes of transportation. Public and private sector entities are eligible to apply for grants or loans and must match at least 30 percent of the project cost in the case of grant application. This program, now in its tenth round, has provided over $500 million for non-highway projects, including numerous rail projects.

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Chapter 2. The Existing Rail System in Oregon

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the existing passenger and freight rail systems and service in Oregon. These elements serve as the baseline for rail planning and decision-making in the state and inform other sections of the State Rail Plan.

2.1 Oregon's freight railroads

The freight rail system in Oregon is part of a nationwide, interconnected system of rail infrastructure and services that link the state and local regions to the rest of North America and, through international marine gateways, to the rest of the world. These marine gateways include the Port of Portland, other Columbia River ports, and coastal ports. The infrastructure supporting rail services in Oregon is substantial, and includes various carload and intermodal facilities, along with significant tunnels and bridges that are necessary to surmount the state's rugged topography.

The Surface Transportation Board classifies railroads in terms of gross operating revenue. The Association of American Railroads classifies railroads based on both annual operating revenue and mileage. The Federal Railroad Administration classifies rail track for freight and passenger trains by maximum allowable operating speeds in miles per hour. These classifications are listed in **Table 2-1** and are referenced throughout this plan.

This section presents a brief overview of the history, evolution and general status of freight railroads and the business structure of the rail industry. It concludes with a discussion of the key physical attributes of the rail network in Oregon. At present, freight railroads in Oregon consist of the two large Class I railroads and 23 Class III short-line railroads, six of which are Class III switching railroads and terminal yards (see **Figure 2-1**).

Table 2-1. Railroad and track classifications

Railroads[1]		
Class	**Annual operating revenues (for 2025)**	
I	Greater than $1.094 billion	
II	Between $49.143 million and $1.094 billion	
III	Less than $49.143 million	
Track[2]		
	Maximum allowable operating speed for:	
Class	**Freight Trains (mph)**	**Passenger Trains (mph)**
Excepted	10	N/A[3]
1	10	15
2	25	30
3	40	60
4	60	80
5	80	90

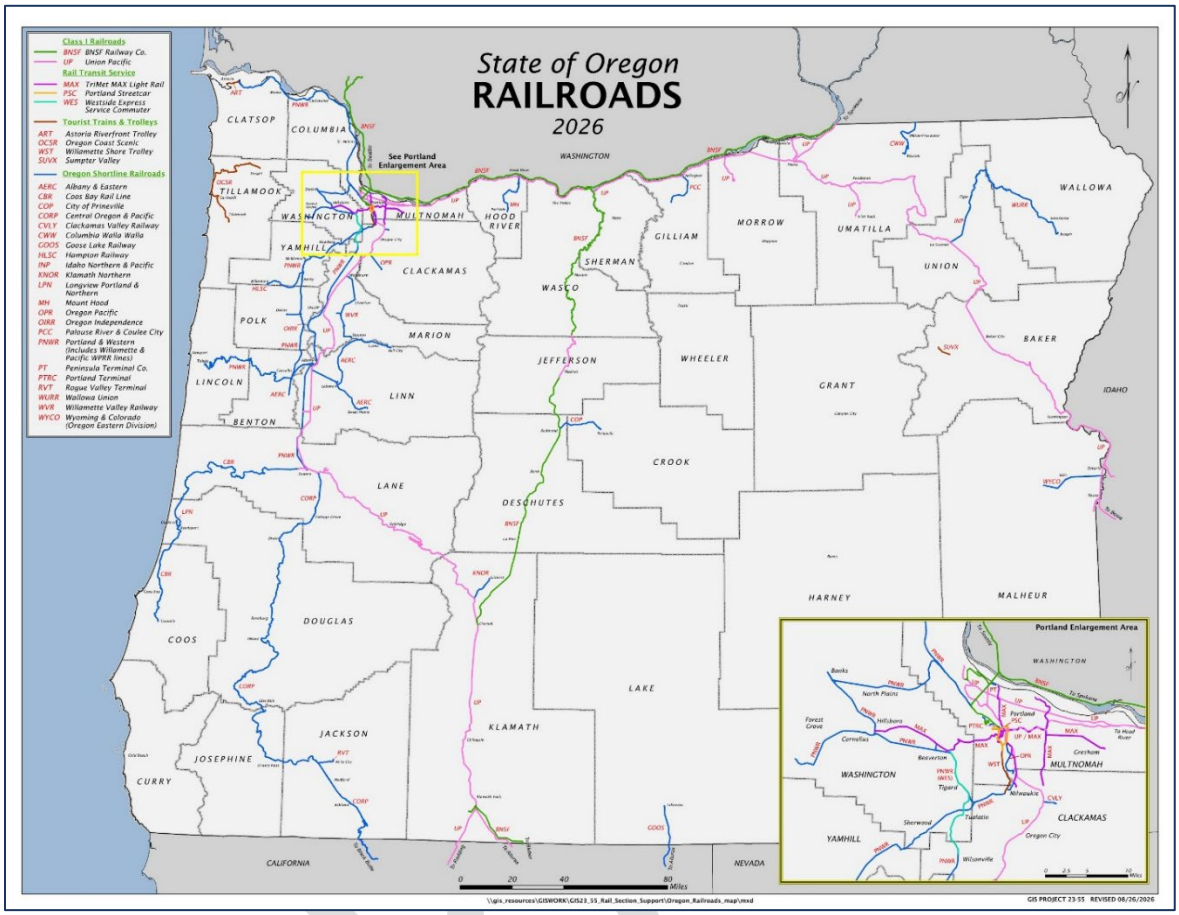
Source: Surface Transportation Board 2026 and Federal Railroad Administration, 2025

[1] https://www.stb.gov/reports-data/economic-data/

[2] Association of American Railroads website on Industry Information: https://www.aar.org/rail-facts/.

[3] Unoccupied passenger equipment may operate at speeds up to 10 mph.

Figure 2-1. Oregon's railroad network[4]



Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2026

2.1.1 Class I railroads

As **Table 2-1** shows, a Class I railroad is defined as earning annual operating revenues in excess of $1.094 billion. Five out of six Class I railroads in the United States operate west of the Mississippi River, and two of the largest operate in Oregon — BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad. **Table 2-2** lists data about the Class I railroads in Oregon.

Table 2-2. Class I railroads in Oregon

	Union Pacific Railroad	BNSF Railway
Route miles in Oregon	1,067	226
Originating carloads	159,335	127,797
Terminating carloads	267,671	165,494
Top train types	Manifest, intermodal, bulk commodities	Manifest, intermodal, grain units

Sources: Association of American Railroads State Facts – Oregon, 2023; BNSF Railway Oregon State Facts, 2023; Union Pacific Railroad Oregon Fact Sheet, 2025, ODOT

[4] Figure 1 lists Portland & Western Railroad, which includes Willamette & Pacific Railroad.

2.1.2 Class II railroads

A Class II railroad is one that earns more than $49.143 million but less than $1.094 billion in annual operating revenue. Oregon has no Class II railroads.

2.1.3 Class III short-line railroads

Class III railroads (also referred to as short-line railroads) are primarily engaged in short-haul pickup and delivery service or switching and terminal operations, as discussed in Section 1.4. There are 23 Class III short-line railroads currently operating in Oregon, as listed in **Table 2-3**.

Table 2-3. Class III railroads in Oregon

Railroad name (standard carrier alpha code)	Route miles in Oregon[5]	Parent Company(ies)
Short Line		
Albany & Eastern (AERC)	71.74	Independent
Central Oregon & Pacific (CORP)	247.02	Genesee & Wyoming Inc. (Holding Co.)
City of Prineville (COP)	18.34	City of Prineville (Municipal)
Columbia Walla Walla (CWW)	21.20	Independent
Coos Bay Rail Line (CBR)	133.39	Oregon International Port of Coos Bay
Goose Lake (GOOS)[6]	14.65	Track owned by Lake County (Shipping and Entrepreneur)
Hampton Railway (HLSC)	5.20	Hampton Lumber Sales Co. (Industry)
Idaho Northern & Pacific (INPR)	20.50	Rio Grande Pacific Corp. (Holding Co.)
Klamath Northern (KNOR)	10.50	Nieman Enterprises (Industry)
Longview Portland & Northern (LPN)	3.39	Industrial Harbor USA, LLC (Land Developer)
Mount Hood (MH)	21.22	Mount Hood Capital Investments (LLC)
Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad (PCC)	11.00	WATCO (Supply Chains)
Portland & Western (PNWR) and Willamette & Pacific (WPRR) Railroads [7]	442.28	Genesee & Wyoming Inc. (Holding Co.)
Wallowa Union (WURR)	63.08	Wallowa & Union Counties (Public)

[5] Route miles are miles of main track not including second main line tracks, sidings and track yardage, except that mileage for some switching and terminal railroads may include industrial and support trackage that ordinarily would not be classified as main line tracks. Original data shown for route miles is derived from 2020 Oregon State Rail Plan and Oregon Department of Transportation Geographic Information Systems layer. All information is verified and current as of 2025.

[6] Goose Lake Railway operates a 54.5-mile branch line, owned by Oregon's Lake County, between Lakeview, Oregon, and Alturas, California; 39.5 miles of the branch line are in California.

[7] The Portland and Western Railroad route miles figure accounts for the trackage of both the Portland & Western and Willamette & Pacific Railroads.

Railroad name (standard carrier alpha code)	Route miles in Oregon[5]	Parent Company(ies)
Willamette Valley (WVR)	33.19	Independent
Wyoming Colorado RR, Oregon Eastern Div. (WYCO)	24.70	Jaguar Transport Holdings
Switching and Terminal		
Clackamas Valley (CVLY)	1.60	Progressive Rail (Holding Co.)
Oregon Independence (OIRR)	0.42	Independent
Oregon Pacific (OPR)	13.16	Independent
Peninsula Terminal Co. (PT)	1.01	Independent
Portland Terminal (PTRC)	0.53	BNSF and Union Pacific (Class I)
Rogue Valley Terminal (RVT)	12.20	CCT Rail System Corp. (Independent)
Total Miles	**1,170.32**	

Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2025

2.1.4 Switching and terminal railroads

A switching and terminal railroad is a non-Class I railroad engaged primarily in switching and/or terminal services for other railroads, irrespective of gross revenues. Local and switching and terminal railroads are typically grouped together with short lines and usually are Class III railroads.

As listed in **Table 2-3**, there are six switching and terminal railroads in Oregon: Clackamas Valley Railway, Oregon Pacific Railroad, Peninsula Terminal Company, Oregon Independence, Portland Terminal Railroad, and Rogue Valley Terminal Railroad. Non-Class I operators can carry out operations at a lower cost and be more responsive to customer needs.

In addition to owned trackage, some railroads also operate over tracks owned by other railroads through contractual agreements. Under such trackage rights arrangements, Union Pacific Railroad operates on 205 additional route miles, while BNSF Railway operates on 106 additional route miles.

Some short-line freight railroads in Oregon also host passenger excursion service as shown in **Figure 2-2**. All of the main line passenger rail services in Oregon, consisting of Amtrak and TriMet's Westside Express Service, operate over tracks owned by private railroads whose main concern is freight.

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Figure 2-2. Mt. Hood Railroad excursion train – Hood River Valley

2.2 Freight railroad operations

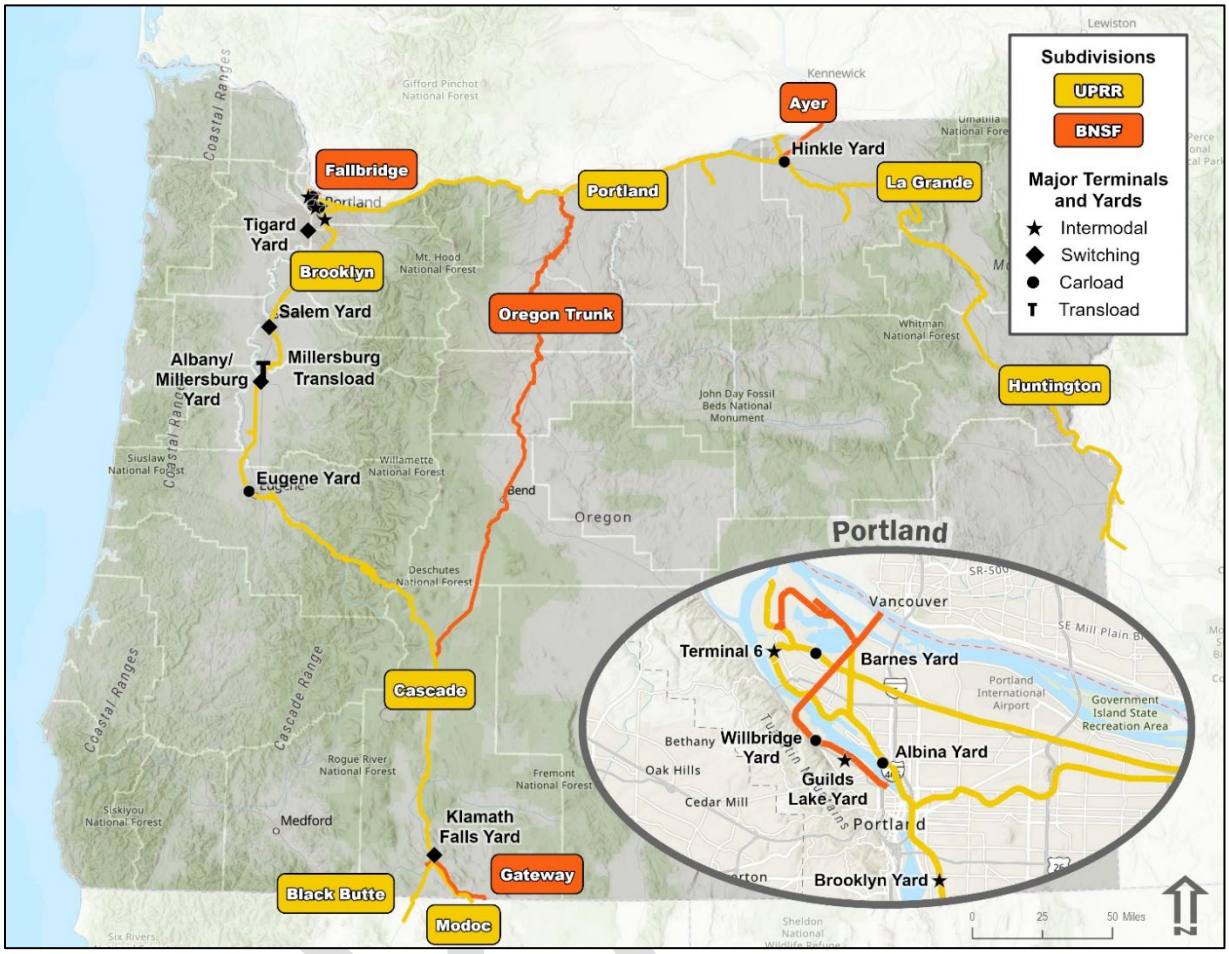
The Class I railroads in Oregon together operate 47.4 percent of all active rail mileage in the state. On these lines, they handle most freight traffic, including virtually all interstate shipments. In 2023 combined, BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad employed just over 1,300 people and handled more than 700,000 carloads that had either an origin or destination in the state (see **Table 2-4)**. In addition, the two railroads handled a considerable volume of through traffic. **Figure 2-3** maps the Class I railroads' subdivisions, terminals and rail yards in Oregon.

Table 2-4. Class I railroad operating characteristics in Oregon

Name	Employees	Payroll (millions of dollars)	Miles operated	Originating carloads	Terminating carloads
Union Pacific	1,011	$134.1	1,067	159,335	267,671
BNSF Railway	270	$20.6	336	127,797	165,494

Sources: Union Pacific in Oregon fact sheet for 2025; BNSF Railway in Oregon fact sheet, 2023, ODOT

Figure 2-3. Oregon's class I railroad subdivisions, major terminals and yards



2.2.1 Union Pacific Railroad

Union Pacific Railroad is the largest rail operator in Oregon by mileage and traffic volume. In 2023 it operated trains over 1,084 miles of track in Oregon, with a staff of 1,011 and a $134.1 million payroll. Union Pacific's Oregon network consists of two primary corridors: an east-west transcontinental route and a north-south route that generally parallels Interstate 5.

Union Pacific's transcontinental route runs between Portland and Hinkle, Oregon, along the southern bank of the Columbia River as shown in **Figure 2-4** (Portland Subdivision). Hinkle is a junction point and the location of a large hump yard built for the classification of carload traffic to and from the Northwest and Canada. Hump yards like that at Hinkle are designed to use gravity to sort railcars. They do so with a combination of multiple smaller yards including a receiving yard for receiving trains from the main line, a hump bowl in which to classify cars from trains from the receiving yard, and a departure yard in which to build trains from strings of cars known as cuts assembled in the hump bowl.

Since 2019, Union Pacific has curtailed the use of Hinkle's hump for gravity switching, instead operating the yard as a flat-switching yard in which crews must classify cars by pushing or pulling them in and out of the classification tracks. Although the yard at Hinkle is not strictly being used for its original purpose, and system activities which were previously carried out at

Hinkle have been moved to yards such as Albina Yard in Portland, the Hinkle Yard still plays an important role in Oregon's rail system, and trains still originate and terminate at the yard.

Figure 2-4. Union Pacific train operating on the Portland Subdivision

The transcontinental route continues southeast from Hinkle (along the La Grande and Huntington subdivisions) to Granger, Wyoming, and Ogden, Utah, connecting to the historic Overland Route that links the San Francisco Bay area with cities such as Salt Lake City, Omaha, and Chicago.

The north-south route is the former Southern Pacific line that connects Portland, Eugene and Klamath Falls (Brooklyn, Cascade and Black Butte subdivisions) to Sacramento and is used by trains from Oregon, Washington and Canada to access destinations in California and the Southwest. The north-south and east-west routes meet in Portland, with Albina Yard serving as the primary carload yard and Brooklyn Yard as the primary intermodal yard. Beyond the main line network, Union Pacific operates very few branch lines in the state; what remains of predecessor Southern Pacific's once extensive branch line network has either been abandoned or is operated by various Class III railroads.

Union Pacific's network in Oregon is predominantly single track with passing sidings. Top inbound commodities include mixed freight handled in containers and trailers, recyclables/waste, fertilizers, soda ash and coal. Top outbound commodities are dominated by mixed freight handled in intermodal service, lumber and building materials, cement and miscellaneous minerals, paper and frozen/refrigerated foodstuff.

2.2.2 BNSF Railway

BNSF Railway is the third largest rail operator in Oregon, with 226 miles of owned track and 188 miles of trackage rights. In 2023, BNSF employed 270 people in Oregon, with a payroll of

$20.6 million. In addition to extensive operations in the Portland region, approximately 313 miles of track comprise a north-south corridor that forms part of BNSF's through route between California and the Pacific Northwest (**Figure 2-5**). Often referred to as the Inside Gateway, the Oregon portion is composed of the segment beginning at the state line near Wishram, Washington, on the Columbia River and continuing through Bend, Chemult, and Klamath Falls to Malin on Oregon's southern border with California. Although it is beyond Oregon's borders, BNSF's main line along the north bank of the Columbia River between Pasco, Wallula, Wishram and Vancouver, Washington, is critical to its service in Oregon and connects back into Oregon at Portland. As seen in **Figure 2-3,** BNSF's ownership of the Inside Gateway is split in half by a section of the route between Chemult and Klamath Falls where the route is dependent on trackage rights over Union Pacific's Cascade Subdivision.

BNSF's top inbound commodities consist of mixed freight moving in intermodal service, agriculture products and industrial products. Mixed freight and forest and industrial products dominate top outbound commodities. Almost all of its network in Oregon consists of single-track main line, with the exception being the roughly 10-mile segment of double-track main line between Portland and Vancouver, Washington.

Figure 2-5. BNSF train crossing the Crooked River Gorge in eastern Oregon

2.2.3 Class III railroads

Class III railroads in Oregon primarily serve line-side industries, such as agriculture and forestry, and provide first- and last- mile connections from industries to Class I railroads. The switching and terminal railroads partially serve the Port of Portland, where they handle carload and containerized goods, as well as serve nearby industries.

While the Class I railroads provide the primary arteries for the movement of goods throughout the state, Class III railroads provide important collector/distributor services for the larger railroads and local rail services for rural shippers. In Oregon, Class III rail lines were built primarily to support the extraction of forest products in the western part of the state along what is now the I-5 corridor. Most of the present Class III railroads in Oregon were created in the 1980s and 1990s as spin-offs from Southern Pacific and Burlington Northern railroads. Notably, these

include what are now the second and fourth largest railroads in Oregon in terms of mileage: the Portland & Western Railroad (including Willamette & Pacific Railroad) and the Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad, respectively. All three of these railroads are owned by Genesee & Wyoming Inc., the largest Class III rail holding company. These three railroads operate 59 percent of the total 1,170.32 Class III railroad mileage in Oregon as of 2025 and earned 76.9 percent of the $90,142,757 Class III revenue in fiscal year 2025.

Table 2-5 lists the Class III railroads in Oregon by revenue per mile. From the table it is evident that Class III railroads in Oregon vary greatly in length and carload volumes. Also evident are great variations in revenue, ranging from $11,000 to more than $33 million. In terms of annual revenue per mile, the highest ranked line is the Peninsula Terminal Co., which provides local switching in Portland. Revenue per mile is a useful indicator of Class III railroad health, because the miles of track that must be maintained directly correlate with maintenance needs. Thus, higher revenue per mile offers the potential to reinvest a greater portion of revenues into the physical system.

Table 2-5. Fiscal Year 2025 Class III railroad carloads and revenue

Name of Railroad	Route Miles	No. of Carloads	Revenue	Revenue / Mile	Percent Total Class III Line Revenue
Peninsula Terminal Company	1.01	2962	$1,855,520	$1,837,149	2.06%
Portland Terminal Railroad	0.53	0	$674,725	$1,273,066	0.75%
Clackamas Valley Railway	1.6	908	$654,586	$409,116	0.73%
Mt. Hood Railroad	21.22	421	$3,767,005	$177,521	4.18%
Wyoming Colorado Railroad, Oregon Eastern Div.	24.7	990	$3,060,346	$123,901	3.39%
Portland & Western Railroad[8]	281.35	35823	$32,662,931	$116,094	36.23%
Rogue Valley Terminal Railroad	12.2	1877	$1,331,803	$109,164	1.48%
Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad	247.02	27675	$25,704,724	$104,059	28.52%
Willamette & Pacific Railroad	160.93	18252	$10,920,765	$67,860	12.11%
Albany & Eastern Railroad	71.74	4058	$3,612,351	$50,353	4.01%
Goose Lake Railway	14.65	390	$550,336	$37,566	0.61%

[8] Note that Portland & Western Railroad has been separated in this table to reflect the individual revenue data of Willamette & Pacific Railroad and Portland & Western Railroad.

Name of Railroad	Route Miles	No. of Carloads	Revenue	Revenue / Mile	Percent Total Class III Line Revenue
Oregon Pacific Railroad	13.16	804	$447,272	$33,987	0.50%
Idaho Northern & Pacific Railroad	20.5	862	$551,175	$26,887	0.61%
Willamette Valley Railway	33.19	1054	$841,729	$25,361	0.93%
City of Prineville Railway	18.34	749	$461,965	$25,189	0.51%
Coos Bay Rail Line	133.39	3991	$2,418,191	$18,129	2.68%
Columbia Walla Walla RR	21.2	191	$183,045	$8,634	0.20%
Klamath Northern Railway	10.5	56	$19,448	$1,852	0.02%
Wallowa Union Railroad	63.08	0	$70,000	$1,110	0.08%
Hampton Railway	5.2	0	$0	$0	0.00%
Longview Portland & Northern Railway	3.39	0	$0	$0	0.00%
Oregon Independence Railroad	0.42	0	$0	$0	0.00%
Total	**1170.32[9]**	**101063**	**$ 90,142,757**	**$ 4,479,256**	**100.00%**
Palouse River & Coulee City Railroad	11[10]	0[11]	$354,840[12]	$32,258[13]	0.39%[14]

Source: Oregon Department of Transportation – 2025 Oregon Short Line Ranking Data

As shown in **Figure 2-6,** the 2007 through 2009 economic recession resulted in a serious decline in short-line shipping and revenue in Oregon. A brief renewal of short-line carload traffic growth peaked in 2014; however, since then, carload traffic in Oregon has been in steady decline. Gross revenues decreased from 2014 and then plateaued for several years. Since 2020, gross revenues attributed to short-line railroad carloads have exceeded the previous peak year of 2005, with the

[9] Not listed in Table 5 are City of Astoria Trackage (2.73 miles), Oregon Coast Scenic Railroad (48.63 miles), former Newberg paper mill spur (1.50 miles), and Sumpter Valley Railroad (6.00 miles).

[10] Data included in Table 5 totals.

[11] Ibid.

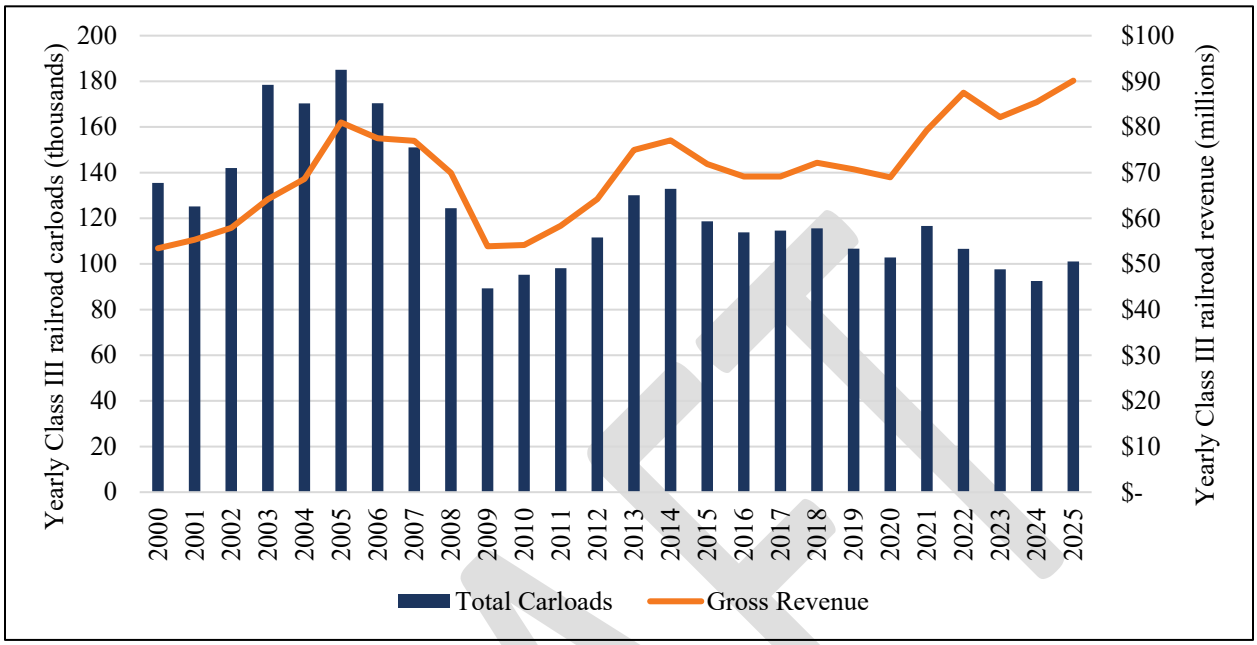
[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

growth attributed to inflation rather than any growth in number of carloads. However, 2025 did show an increase in carloads, reversing the previous declines.

Figure 2-6. Oregon's short-line carloads and revenue: 2000-2025



Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2025

2.2.4 Key railroad facilities

Rail yards and terminals form an integral component of every rail network and serve different functions as follows:

1. **Terminals provide access to the rail system, typically through a transfer between highway or water and rail.** The transfer can take place in the form of shifting an intact container or truck trailer holding goods from one mode to another or moving (e.g., transloading) the contents from a truck or vessel to a railcar. Common commodities that are transferred in this manner include bulk goods, such as grain, cement and plastic pellets; assembled motor vehicles; and project cargoes, such as electrical transformers and windmill parts. Facilities where trailers and containers are transferred intact between modes are typically called intermodal terminals.
2. **System, local, and industry yards serve various functions in the handling of carload rail traffic.** As a rail car travels across the rail network from origin to destination, it goes through a series of rail yards, where trains are separated into single railcars or blocks of cars and sorted by subsequent destination, which could range from a train serving nearby industry to a yard thousands of miles away.

The primary function of system yards is to build and break down trains to and from other system yards. These large yards usually gather cuts of railcars from local or industry yards, then classify those railcars according to destination and weight and assemble complete trains for distribution throughout the railroad's network. System yards also frequently include areas which carry out the functions of local and industry yards from which the railroad can serve branch lines, industrial tracks or industries from the system yard itself.

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The function of local yards is to gather cuts of cars from local industries, Class III railroad connections, and industrial tracks for addition to main line through trains or for sending to a system yard. These yards are usually smaller than system yards, have less extensive facilities, and serve a much smaller geographic area, but are crucial in gathering the carload traffic which creates manifest freight trains. Industry yards can be similar to local yards, except that they are usually smaller and cater to either a cluster of industries located around the yard or a single large industrial customer.

Oregon is home to one or more yards and terminals of each of these types. Over the years, BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad have concentrated their operations in fewer locations. This consolidation has occurred as a result of operational efficiency, technology improvements, and the railroad industry's evolving traffic mix. For example, an increasing preference for unit trains which carry a single commodity (for example grain or intermodal containers) has reduced the need for some system yards. Today, Oregon is served by four primary system yards: Hinkle Yard, Albina Yard and Brooklyn Intermodal Yard on the Union Pacific Railroad, and Lake Yard on BNSF Railway. All but Hinkle are located in Portland and shown in **Figure 2-3**.

Intermodal terminals are key links in supply chains that utilize Oregon's public ports. There are several different types of intermodal terminals, each serving a different purpose. On-dock rail terminals handle international containers moving from ship to rail and vice versa, while near-dock terminals can handle both port-related and highway traffic. Inland terminals generally handle the transfer of containers and highway trailers between truck and rail. **Table 2-6** lists the key rail yards and intermodal terminals in Oregon.

Figure 2-7. Rail service at Port of Portland's Terminal 5 – grain and potash dry bulk exports

The Mid-Willamette Valley Intermodal Center is a $35.5 million, 64-acre multimodal hub in Millersburg, Oregon. Construction was completed in 2023, and the hub has the potential for connecting rail, trucks, and ocean carriers to the valley's natural resource-based economy.

Trucks will bring international intermodal containers to the Intermodal Center for transload to rail cars before those railcars travel north to Pacific Northwest marine terminals.

Table 2-6. Key rail yards and intermodal terminals in Oregon

Railroad	Name	Location	Type	Description
BNSF	Lake Yard	Portland	Intermodal and Carload System	BNSF intermodal regional hub. System carload interchange between BNSF, Union Pacific, and Portland Terminal Railroad
BNSF/ Union Pacific	Terminal 6 Intermodal Yard	Port of Portland	Intermodal and Import Autos	Import autos and intermodal facility with marine interface and connection to BNSF and Union Pacific main lines
BNSF	Willbridge Yard	Portland	Carload	Local/industry yard; primarily services the chemical and petroleum products industries, adjacent to Lake Yard
BNSF	Rivergate Yard	Portland	Switching and Import Autos	Local yard; supports Port of Portland Terminals 4, 5 and 6, and the Rivergate industrial area
Portland & Western	Albany and Millersburg Yards	Albany	Switching	Local yard; switching, transloading and storing rail cars (BNSF, Union Pacific)
Portland & Western	Tigard Yard	Tigard	Switching	Local yard; switching, train makeup and storing rail cars (Union Pacific, BNSF)
Central Oregon & Pacific	Winchester Yard	North of Roseburg	Switching	Local yard; The railroad's principal yard for train makeup, switching, storing and distributing cars
Union Pacific	Albina Yard	Portland	Carload	Regional and system carload yard; some locomotive servicing
Union Pacific	Barnes Yard	North Portland	Carload	Local yard; Supports Port of Portland Terminals 4, 5 and 6 and Rivergate industrial area
Union Pacific	Brooklyn Yard	Portland	Intermodal	System yard; Union Pacific Portland intermodal facility
Central Oregon & Pacific	Eugene Yard	Eugene	Carload/ Switching	Local yard; Connections between Union Pacific and three short lines: Central Oregon & Pacific, Portland & Western Railroad and Coos Bay Rail Line. Former system hump yard.
Union Pacific	Salem Yard	Salem	Switching	Local yard; service hub for the Willamette Valley
Union Pacific	Hinkle Yard	Hinkle	Carload/ Switching	Union Pacific's Pacific Northwest system yard for staging transcontinental traffic; some duties have been moved to Albina Yard.
BNSF & Union Pacific	Klamath Falls Yards	Klamath Falls	Switching	Local yard; Switching, storing rail cars and minor locomotive servicing (BNSF and Union Pacific have separate yards and interchange at Bieber Line Junction between the two)

Sources: Oregon Rail Study, 2010; Port of Portland website; BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad Oregon Factsheets, 2023; ODOT, 2019; ODOT, 2025

2.3 Rail system conditions and characteristics

2.3.1 Physical conditions and operating characteristics

This State Rail Plan process included a review of existing conditions and key operating characteristics of rail lines in Oregon considering such items as maximum speeds (track class), number of tracks, weight limits, double-stack capability, traffic control systems, grade crossings, tunnels and bridge conditions. Together, these items affect the performance of the rail system significantly and form the basis for existing and future infrastructure needs and improvements.

2.3.1.1 Weight limits

Throughout the history of the railroad industry, equipment has increased in size and capacity as track and rolling stock technology has advanced. In the 1970s, the industry moved from a standard 70-ton capacity car to a 100-ton (263,000-pound) capacity car. Standard weight limits increased again in 1995 to 286,000 pounds. Although this increase produced significant productivity benefits for the industry, it also required improvement of railroad infrastructure in some instances. The Class I railroads were able to complete these improvements; however, making these improvements is more difficult for Class II and III railroads because of their lack of budget capacity for significant infrastructure renewal. The deteriorating state and sometimes functional obsolescence of their tracks, bridges and other infrastructure is thus sometimes left unabated. As a result, many Class II and III railroads restrict the heavier cars from their networks for safety reasons until improvements can be made.

As the railroad industry has shifted to 286,000-pound capacity equipment it has become a necessity for all operators to accommodate the heavier cars. For some Class II and III railroads, this necessity is a competitive issue, because an inability to accommodate the 286,000-pound capacity equipment impairs their long-term viability. A regularly updated survey of 286,000-pound capacity conducted by ODOT found that all the mileage owned by Class I railroads could accommodate the heavier cars, but only 78 percent of Class III railroad-owned mileage could do so. However, it is not necessarily accurate to conclude that 84 percent of the rail network can sustainably handle the heavier equipment. Competitive market pressures have caused some carriers to move 286,000-pound cars over track that is considered too light for the task. The railroad either accepts the maintenance impacts of heavier cars or risks losing the business altogether.[15]

Better indicators of Oregon railroad health are the number of track-miles maintained to Federal Railroad Administration Class 2 track standards or greater, and track-miles laid with 110-pound-per-yard or heavier rail.[16] Class 2 track permits maximum speeds of up to 25 mph for freight and 30 mph for passenger trains. Branch and secondary main lines often fall into this class, and it is commonly viewed that these are the minimum speeds needed for Class III railroad lines of any length to operate efficiently and be competitive.[17] About 35 percent (around 500 miles) of mileage in Oregon owned by Class III railroads is not up to Class 2 track standards.

[15] Oregon Department of Transportation Rail Division – 286,000 pound Survey, 2006.

[16] Ibid.

[17] https://www.trains.com/trn/train-basics/abcs-of-railroading/track-classifications/.

In addition, railroad track must be constructed with sufficiently heavy rails to withstand the stresses from higher weights and speeds in an economically efficient manner. About 34 percent (or nearly 500 miles) of the heavy rail network in Oregon comprises rail that is lighter than 110 pounds per yard, which is the minimum weight at which 286,000-pound operations can be conducted economically over the long run. Eventually, this lighter rail must be replaced.

Multiple railroads have completed various rail upgrades in Oregon over the past five years with support funding from Connect Oregon[18] (which is supported by private or federal matching funds). These upgrades include portions of: Goose Lake Railway ($1.91 million), Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad ($5.7 million), Wyoming Colorado Railroad ($1.69 million and $1.18 million), Portland & Western Railroad ($1.78 million) and Mt. Hood Railroad ($2.58 million).

2.3.1.2 Bridges

A further critical factor affecting general conditions and the ability to efficiently handle 286,000-pound equipment is the condition of bridges and other significant structures. The 2010 Oregon Rail Study included a bridge condition assessment of 332 bridges located on 15 Class III railroads. The study evaluated bridges to determine their load capacity and remaining service life and produced cost estimates to upgrade or repair them. The estimates were based on the ability to carry 286,000-pound rail cars at 10 mph and at 25 mph.

The study found investment needs ranging from $124 million for repairs necessary to achieve 10 mph, $147 million to achieve 25 mph, and $1.436 billion for complete replacement. These costs have risen significantly since 2010. One of these bridges is shown in **Figure 2-8.**

Figure 2-8. Coos Bay Rail Line train over the Siuslaw River Bridge

[18] Connect Oregon funded projects list.

Since the 2010 study was completed, several rail lines have received Connect Oregon funds to rehabilitate bridges. These include the Phase II Coos Bay Railroad and Mt. Hood Railroad Bridges Fortification, funded by Connect Oregon at $247,000; Bridge Program #1 Wyoming Colorado Railroad Inc., funded by Connect Oregon at $119,749; and bridge replacement Milepost 662.00 Union Pacific Railroad, funded by Connect Oregon at $4 million.

2.3.1.3 Tunnels and curves

Since rail lines were first constructed, the dimensions of rolling stock have increased, sometimes necessitating changes in bridges, tunnels and other infrastructure to accommodate them. Since the 1970s, the growth in the movement of intermodal containers, assembled motor vehicles and specialty cargoes, such as windmill parts and machinery, has increased requirements for vertical and horizontal clearances. Size requirements have increased particularly with respect to containers, which are most efficiently handled when they are stacked two high. This configuration that requires minimum vertical clearances between 18 feet 6 inches and 20 feet 8 inches depending which type of containers are stacked together. Tri-level vehicle cars known as auto-racks require a vertical clearance of 19 feet 6 inches. Primarily by greatly reducing line-haul costs and improving ride quality, the application of double-stack rolling stock contributed substantially to the rapid growth in intermodal volumes in North America since the mid-1980s.

Except for BNSF's Oregon Trunk Line, the main line network in the state has been adapted to accommodate double-stack operations (**Figure 2-9**). Some Class III railroad lines have no known clearance limitations, while others do not have sufficient clearance to accommodate double-stacked container traffic. For many of these Class III railroads, the nature of the traffic they handle does not require clearance for double-stack service, but expanded vertical and horizontal clearances may be beneficial for the handling of other types of large loads.

The 2010 Oregon Rail Study includes a rail tunnel assessment that evaluated 24 out of 34 tunnels on Class III routes in Oregon. The 24 tunnels, which range in length from 128 feet to 4,202 feet, are distributed on three railroads: Central Oregon & Pacific (11 tunnels), Portland & Western Railroad (4 tunnels) and Coos Bay Rail Line (9 tunnels). The study developed individual cost estimates for repairing each of the 24 tunnels to achieve a 20-year life expectancy and to provide sufficient clearances to accommodate double-stack rail cars. Repair costs for all tunnels were projected to total $32 million if clearances were not increased, and $92 million with increased clearances. The locations of the tunnels, their lengths and their condition figure highly in the rehabilitation costs and risk to the system.[19] As with the previously discussed bridge improvement cost estimates, these cost estimates have also risen significantly since the Oregon Rail Study was conducted.

Since 2009, a combination of $26 million in federal funding and $7.8 million in Connect Oregon[20] funding has allowed the Port of Coos Bay to rehabilitate its nine tunnels, repair the infrastructure and resume efficient operation over the line.[21] An additional $10 million in

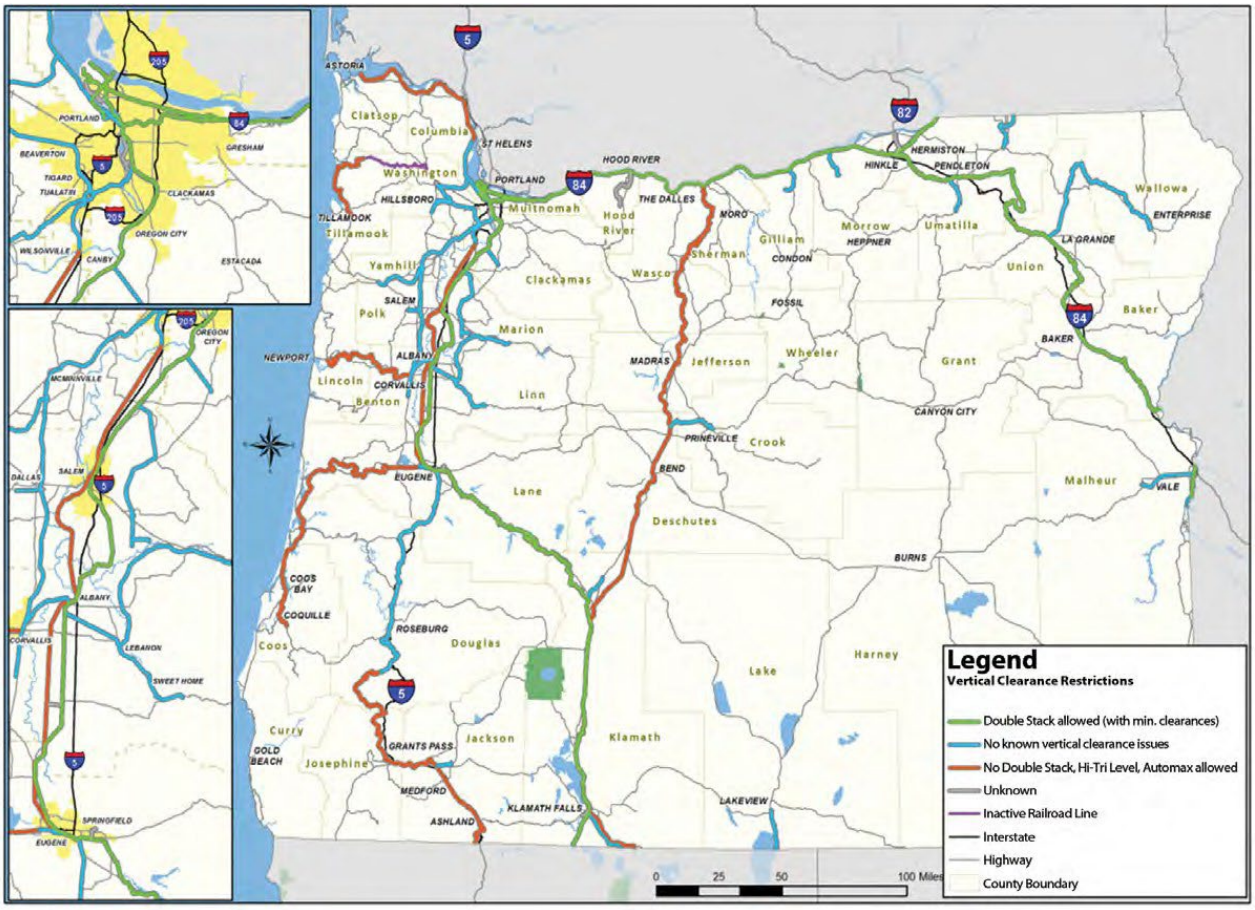
[19] Oregon Rail Study, 2010.

[20] This is a funding program created by the Oregon Legislature in 2005, and subsequently renewed, to fund multimodal transportation projects.

[21] https://www.portofcoosbay.com/coos-bay-rail-line-tunnel-rehabilitation-project.

rehabilitation funds was obtained in both 2013 and the 2015. This tunnel rehabilitation work was completed in December 2020.

Figure 2-9. Vertical clearance restrictions on Oregon railroads



Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2025

2.3.2 Traffic control systems

Systems for controlling rail traffic serve two primary purposes: (1) preventing trains from colliding with each other and (2) efficiently managing the flow of traffic. There are several different types of systems that differ in their sophistication and complexity. The most basic method for controlling operations is called Track Warrant Control, whereby train crews are given written permission by dispatchers via radio to operate within specified segments in the form of track warrants. Track Warrant Control, which does not require any wayside equipment, is best suited for lines with low traffic volumes. More advanced control methods which permit higher speeds include: (1) Automatic Block Signaling, which controls train spacing by dividing a line into segments or blocks and includes wayside (or in-cab) signals automatically indicating occupancy status of subsequent blocks, and (2) Centralized Traffic Control, whereby a dispatcher remotely controls signals and sets train paths from a central location. Centralized Traffic Control systems improve efficiencies by consolidating operations management, improving safety and increasing capacity on lines with higher volumes.

In Oregon, the majority of Class I railroad mileage is operated under Centralized Traffic Control systems and has freight train speeds up to 60 mph and passenger speeds up to 79 mph. This

mileage operated under Centralized Traffic Control includes Union Pacific Railroad's transcontinental and I-5 corridor main lines. Centralized Traffic Control and Track Warrant Control types of systems are both used to control BNSF's Oregon Trunk Line. Portland & Western Railroad uses cab signals along the route of TriMet's Westside Express Service between Beaverton and Wilsonville. The remaining railroads in Oregon, all of which are Class III railroads, utilize either Track Warrant Control or other methods of manual control. Central Oregon & Pacific relies primarily on Track Warrant Control but augments it with Automatic Block Signaling on the north end of its line.

The Railway Safety Improvement Act of 2008 mandated that the railroad industry implement traffic control technology called Positive Train Control. Positive Train Control is implemented as an "overlay" to existing signal systems, for the express goals of preventing overspeed derailments and preventing collisions between trains and other authorized track occupants. The deadline for implementation of Positive Train Control was December 2020 on most lines that handle regularly scheduled passenger trains or toxic-by-inhalation hazardous materials, or lines with freight volumes greater than 5 million gross ton miles annually. In Oregon, all lines that are required by the Act to do so have implemented Positive Train Control.

2.3.3 At-grade rail crossings

At-grade crossings are the most common locations where the general population interacts with railroads. As a result, the primary locations and causes of injuries and fatalities related to rail service are from incidents occurring at at-grade crossings and, even more so, from trespassing on railroad property. Population growth, along with increased rail, vehicular and pedestrian traffic, is expected to increase interactions at public at-grade crossings (**Figure 2-10**). These increased interactions will have negative implications for safety, delays for vehicles and pedestrians, and associated impacts.

Figure 2-10. One of Oregon's 2,300 at-grade crossings

In Oregon there are approximately 2,300 public at-grade rail crossings;[22] the greatest number of these are situated in Linn, Marion, Multnomah and Lane counties. Many at-grade rail crossings reside on short-line railroads within lightly populated rural areas, utilizing just a cross buck or stop sign as their warning device. A number of crossings use more advanced systems, such as flashing lights and crossings gates; 875 crossings use crossing gates and/or flashing lights (at least 71 crossings have flashing lights, and at least 804 crossings use a crossing gate). Flashing lights and gates are more common in heavily populated areas, such as Portland and Eugene. This is to enhance safety at crossings with higher risk of incidents due to higher usage. Railroads with the most crossings are Portland & Western Railroad (573 crossings), Union Pacific (447 crossings), Central Oregon & Pacific (170 crossings) and BNSF (129 crossings).[23]

Trespassing on a railroad's private property and along railroad rights of way is the leading cause of rail-related fatalities in the United States. Since 1997, more people have been fatally injured each year by trespassing than in motor vehicle collisions with trains at highway-rail at-grade crossings. In Oregon, between 2020 and 2024, there were 138 trespassing incidents that resulted in death or injury.[24]

2.3.4 Line abandonments

In the wake of rail deregulation in 1980, railroads moved to improve their financial performance by selling or abandoning lines with poor prospects. Although the most marginal lines were abandoned, many were sold or leased to Class III railroad operators. Subsequently, these operators either succeeded in improving the financial performance of the line through lower operating costs and improved service or were eventually forced to cease operations. Thus, while abandonment applications were once primarily a Class I phenomenon, in recent years, Class III railroads have filed a growing portion of line abandonments.

The attempted abandonment in 2008 and subsequent reopening in October 2011 of the Coos Bay Rail Line presents an opportunity to understand the importance of rail preservation. In 2007, Central Oregon & Pacific embargoed the Coos Bay line due to safety concerns in three tunnels that had resulted from a backlog of deferred maintenance. These safety concerns forced shippers on the line to seek alternative transportation options.

2.3.5 Strategic Rail Corridor Network

Oregon's Strategic Rail Corridor Network consists of Class I freight rail main lines that form part of the national network that is designated for defense-related transportation. These routes, shown below in **Figure 2-11**, primarily follow Oregon's major north-south and east-west freight corridors, especially through the Portland rail hub and along Union Pacific and BNSF main lines that connect Oregon to Washington, California and national rail systems. Inclusion in the Strategic Rail Corridor Network indicates that these corridor segments are considered critical for moving military equipment, oversized loads and other defense assets, and they generally meet higher standards for clearance, capacity and reliability. Though the network serves everyday commercial freight, its designation reflects Oregon's role in supporting national defense logistics within the broader U.S. rail system.

[22] ODOT Commerce and Compliance section, 2025

[23] Data extract from ODOT Rail and Public Transit Division, 2020.

[24] https://safetydata.fra.dot.gov/officeofsafety/publicsite/query/castally4.aspx.

Figure 2-11. Oregon's Strategic Rail Corridor Network-designated rail lines

Source: https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2025/08/26/2707eb85/stracnet-2023.pdf

2.4 Oregon's passenger rail system

Passenger rail serves a variety of mobility needs. In Oregon, these needs 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, which provides commuter services, and Amtrak intercity and long-distance services serving Oregon all operate over the national rail network.

2.4.1 Passenger rail system

As discussed in Chapter 1, federal law classifies intercity passenger rail services into two types: (1) corridors of more than 750 miles in length, which are classified as long-distance trains, and (2) corridors of less than 750 miles in length, which are considered short-distance corridors. Amtrak bears full responsibility for the operation of long-distance train service, and the related costs are 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 respect to stations. For short-distance corridor train services, the financial responsibility shifted is to states (or other sponsors).

Amtrak operates three routes in Oregon — two long-distance routes and one short-distance route — as shown in **Figure 2-12**.

Figure 2-12. Passenger Rail Service in Oregon

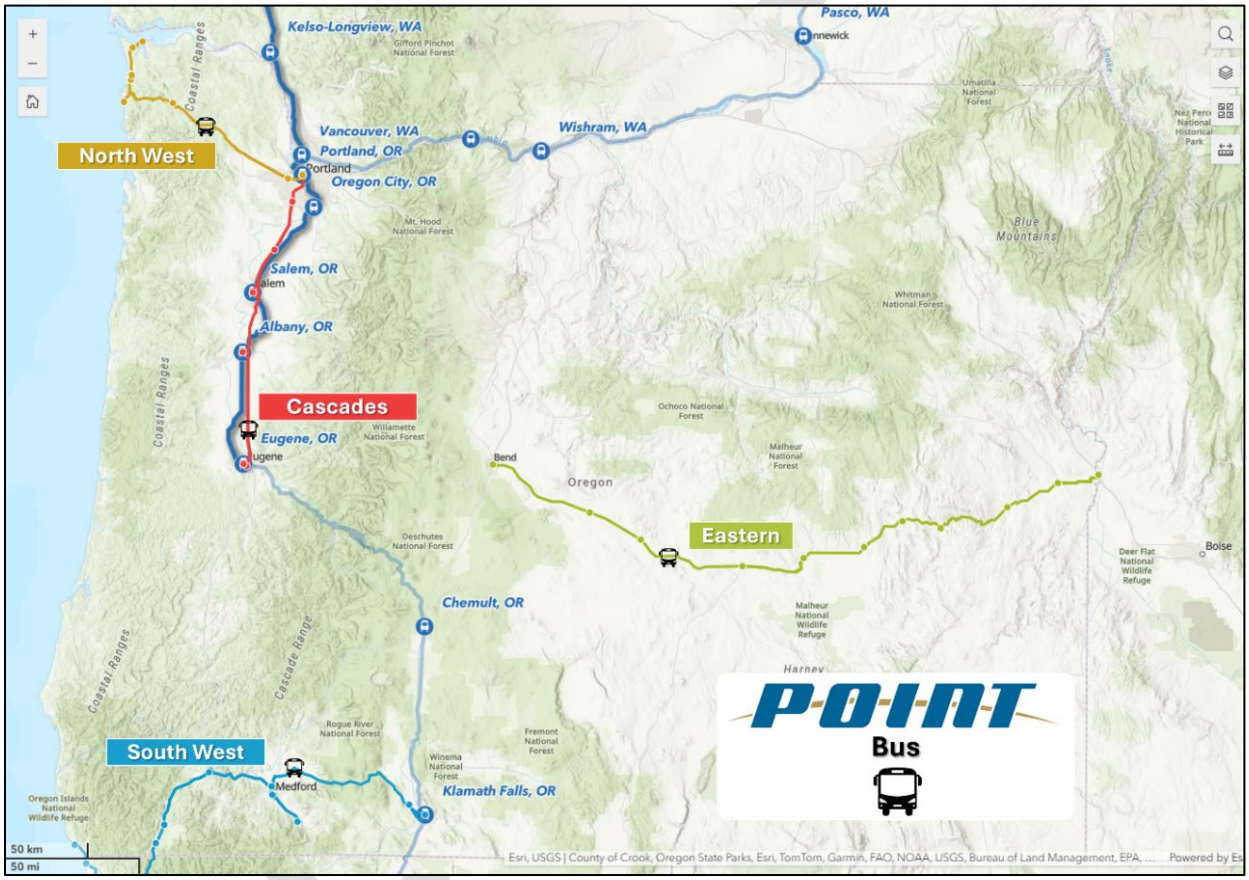
Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2025

- ***Empire Builder*:** An Amtrak long-distance train that links Chicago with Portland and Seattle via Milwaukee, St. Paul/Minneapolis, 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, Minnesota Commercial, Canadian Pacific 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, BNSF and Sound Transit. Within Oregon, Union Pacific 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 461 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.

Dedicated intercity bus services contracted by ODOT support Oregon's intercity passenger train network. Operating as POINT *Thruway* (**Figure 2-13)**, 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 2-13. POINT *Thruway* bus connecting service in Oregon



Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2025

2.4.1.1 Intercity passenger rail station facilities

The *Empire Builder, Coast Starlight* and Amtrak Cascades serve a total of seven stations in Oregon. **Table 2-7** 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 2-7. Oregon Amtrak stations and connecting services

Stations	*Empire Builder*	*Coast Starlight*	Amtrak Cascades	Parking Spaces	POINT *Thruway* and Other Bus Services	Local Transit Connections
Portland Union Station	✓	✓	✓	200 long-term 25 short-term	Cascades POINT, North West POINT	TriMet MAX (Green, Yellow and Orange lines) and Bus, Caravan Airport Shuttle, NW Connector, Central Oregon 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, Pacific Crest Bus (Greyhound/FlixBus), Cherriots, Microtransit (bike and scooter share)
Albany Station		✓	✓	50 long-term 20 short-term	Cascades POINT	Albany Transit System, Lincoln County Transit, Linn-Benton Loop, Coast to Valley Express, Linn Shuttle
Eugene Station		✓	✓	36 long-term 8 short-term	Cascades POINT, Eugene-Bend Porter Stage	Lane Transit District, Pacific Crest Bus (Greyhound/FlixBus), Link Lane, Microtransit (bike and scooter share)
Chemult Station		✓		25 long-term 6 short-term		
Klamath Falls Station		✓		60 long-term 20 short-term	South West POINT	Basin Transit Service, Pacific Crest Bus (Greyhound/FlixBus), Sage Stage

2.4.1.2 Amtrak Cascades

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

The frequency of the 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, British Columbia, 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 2 hours and 35 minutes for the 123 miles between Portland and Eugene, the average speed is 42 mph.

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Operation of 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, Canadian National and Union Pacific Railroad rail lines.
- **Washington State Department of Transportation** – Co-sponsor of the Amtrak Cascades service with ODOT.
- **Union Pacific Railroad, BNSF Railway, Sound Transit and Canadian National Railroad** – the three Class I railroads that host the Amtrak Cascades service as well as Sound Transit.
- **Talgo** – the company that manufactured and maintains the Series 8 Talgo (Oregon-owned) trainsets currently in operation in the Amtrak Cascades service[25].

Operation funding needs and sources

Oregon and Washington fund the Amtrak Cascades. In Oregon, ticket revenues fund approximately 31 percent of Amtrak Cascades operating costs for Oregon, while the state funds 69 percent. As co-sponsors of the service, Oregon and Washington have significant control over operational and business decisions that affect the costs and revenues of Amtrak Cascades service. Oregon and Washington also have influence over whether Amtrak Cascades service emphasizes operational cost recovery as opposed to encouraging maximum ridership.

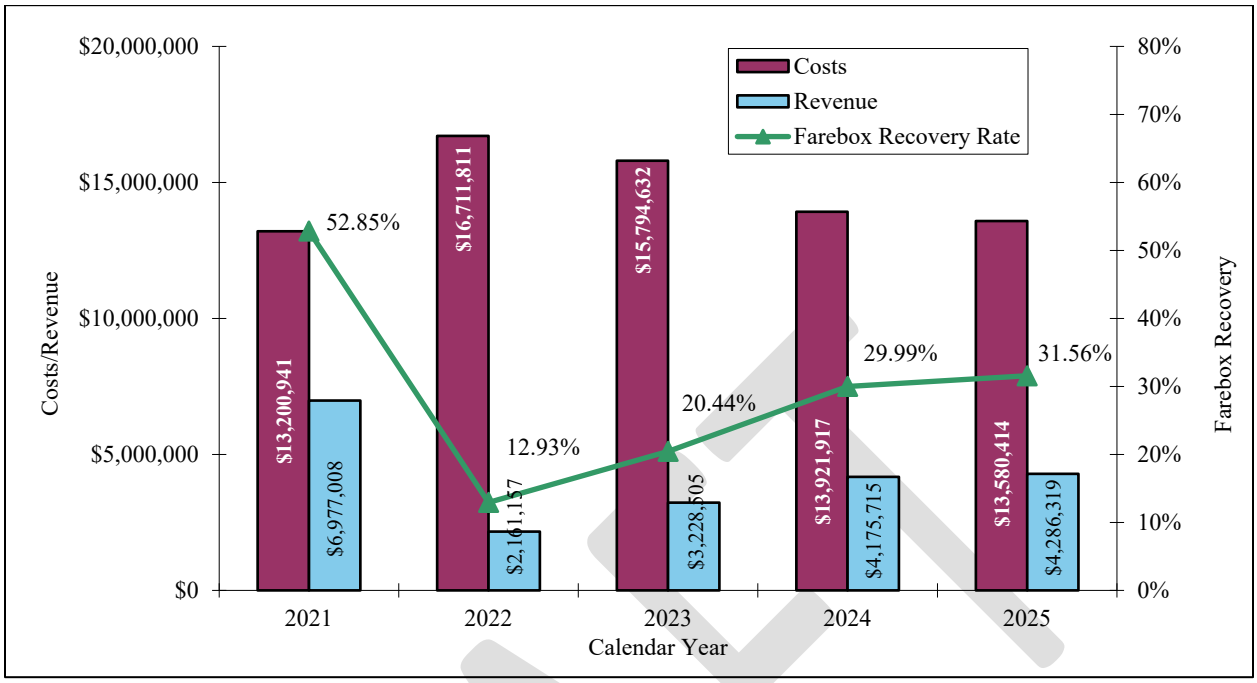
2.4.1.3 Farebox recovery

Figure 2-14 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 costs and host railroad costs. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the farebox recovery rate was approximately 25 percent. The farebox recovery rate in 2021 was higher due to one-time federal COVID-19 relief funding.

ODOT and the Washington State Department of Transportation are the governmental entities responsible for Amtrak Cascades passenger rail service in the Pacific Northwest and have a long history of collaboration that contributes to the success of the service. The states recognize that partnership is the only way to overcome the significant hurdles involved in the continued development 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, ODOT and the Washington State Department of Transportation anticipate that this shared vision will increase ridership, enhance customer retention and service, and result in Amtrak Cascades service being an increasingly competitive transportation choice for travelers in the region.

[25] These trains are expected to be replaced by new Airo Trainsets between late 2026 and 2027

Figure 2-14. Oregon Amtrak Cascades operating cost, revenue and farebox recovery rate: 2021-2025



Source: ODOT Public Transportation Division, based on financial billing reconciliation data from Amtrak

2.4.2 Passenger rail service objectives and evaluation

This section summarizes the recent performance and the key challenges facing the three Amtrak passenger rail routes operating in Oregon: Amtrak Cascades, *Empire Builder* and *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 Corridor Identification and Development program, which includes the Service Development Plan update. That detailed analysis has identified a set of specific capital projects aimed at improving passenger rail service between Portland and Eugene-Springfield.

2.4.2.1 Passenger rail use within Oregon

During Fiscal Year 2024, approximately 9 percent (94,000 passengers) of all Amtrak intercity rail trips in the state were intrastate trips in which both the traveler's origin and destination were in Oregon. In Fiscal Year 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).

During Fiscal Year 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.

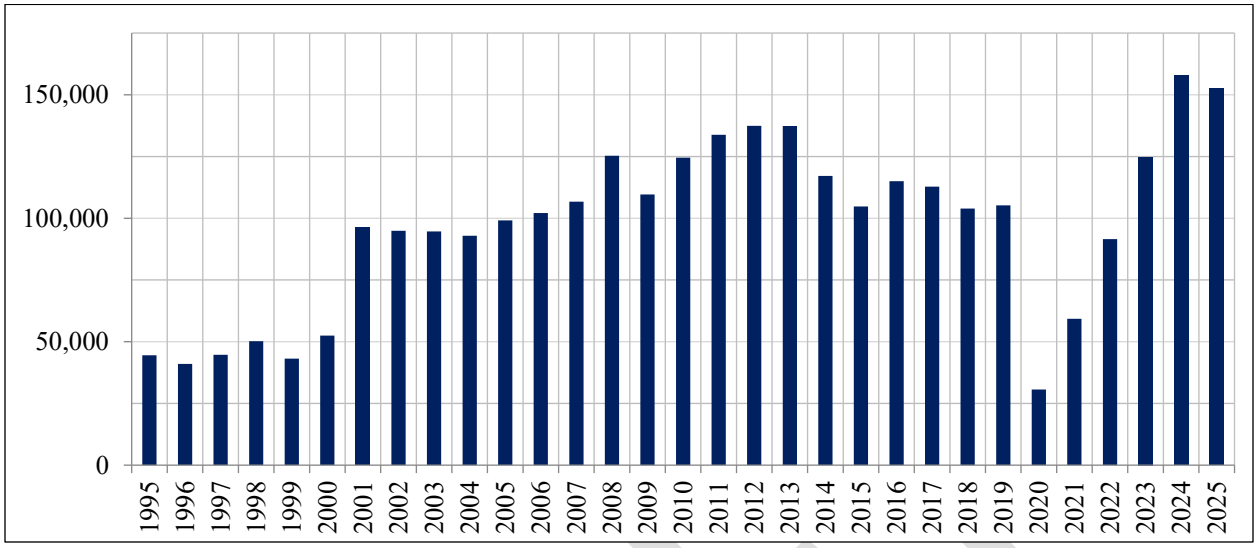
2.4.3 Amtrak Cascades service

2.4.3.1 Ridership

Overall ridership on Amtrak Cascades has more than recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, achieving all-time record ridership after 2020, as **Figure 2-15** and **Figure 2-16** illustrate. Passenger rail ridership on 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. Though ridership fell slightly from 2024 to 2025, this dip in ridership is not considered as an indication of any reduction in demand for the service. Rather, it was due to the sudden withdrawal of the Amtrak Cascades fleet of Horizon passenger coaches[26] in March and subsequent replacement of the fleet with shorter consists of Amfleet coaches. The shortened train consists had fewer available seats, restricting the number of passengers they could carry. The current forecast is that ridership will continue to increase along with population growth in the Willamette Valley as the Amtrak Cascades fleet is renewed by the addition of the new, higher-capacity Airo trainsets beginning in late 2026 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.

[26] https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/intercity/amtrak-pulls-horizon-fleet/

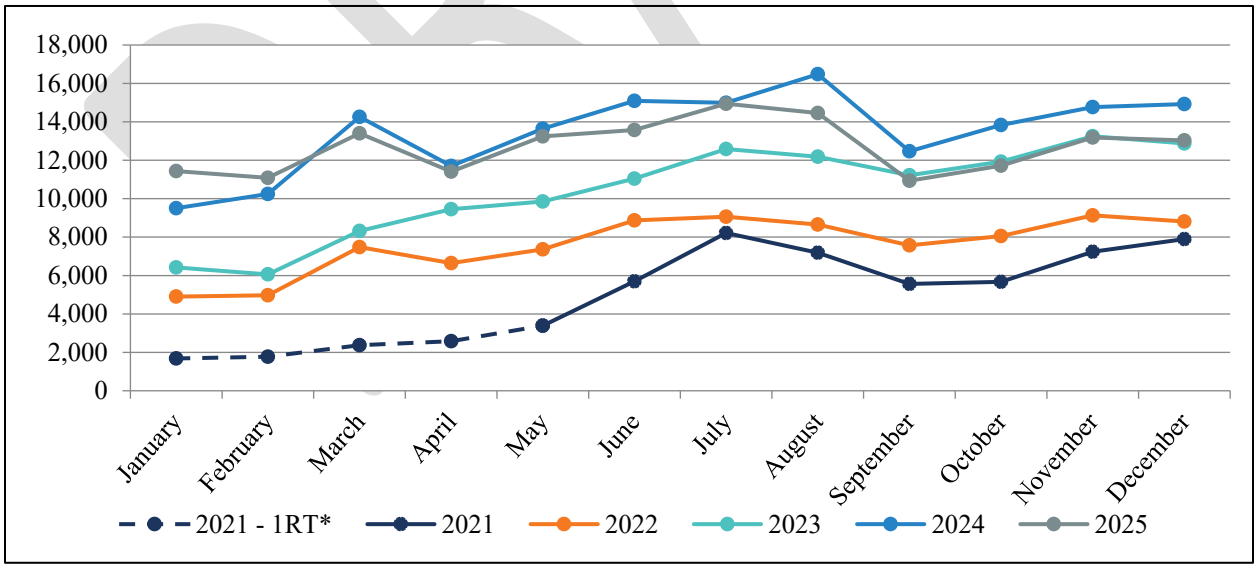
Figure 2-15. Oregon Amtrak Cascades ridership: 1995-2025



Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025

Figure 2-16 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 end-of-year holidays.

Figure 2-16. Seasonal ridership variation of Oregon Amtrak Cascades: 2021-2025[27]



m*RT = Round trip between Portland and Eugene.
Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025

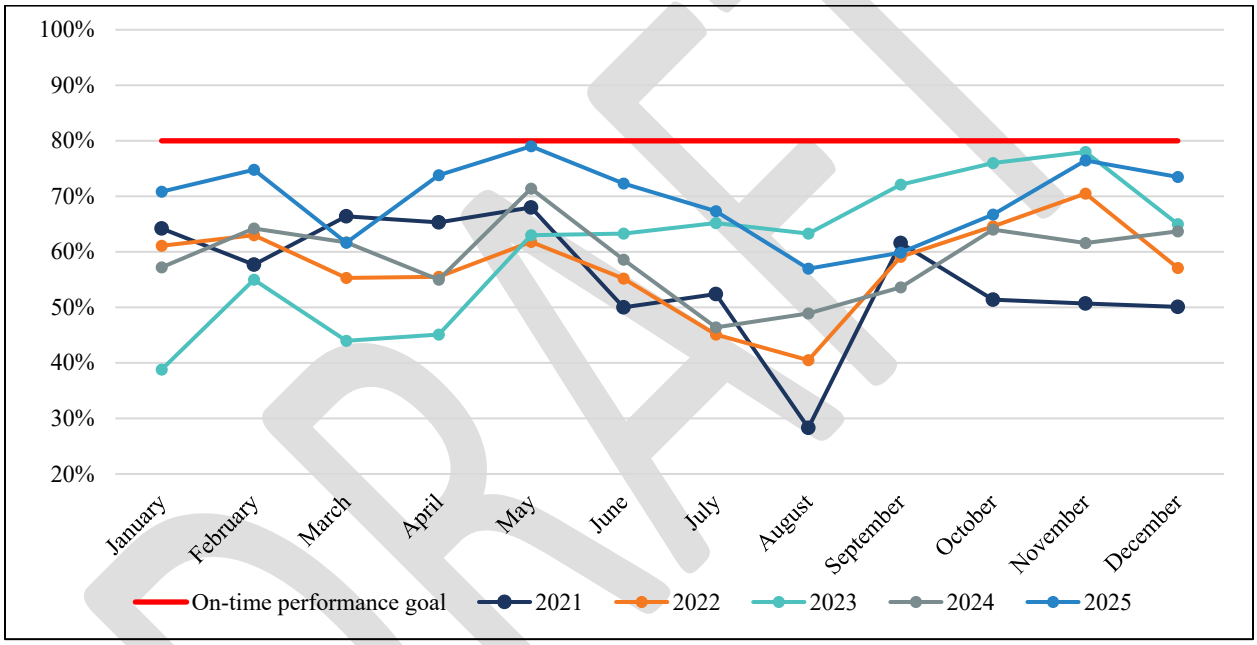
[27] The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting decreases in demand led to the decision to reduce service to one round trip per day between Seattle and Eugene. Service of two daily round trips resumed on May 24, 2021. The dotted lines above depict the time frame when the service was reduced to one round trip daily.

2.4.3.2 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 with a goal of achieving it at least 80 percent of the time.

To analyze Amtrak Cascades performance specifically within Oregon, ODOT separately measures on-time performance for the Portland-Eugene corridor segment using a "public on-time performance" metric, which measures the percentage of trains that arrive within 15 minutes of the scheduled arrival time in the public schedule. Amtrak Cascades on-time performance has continuously underperformed since the COVID-19 pandemic, as shown in **Figure 2-17**.

Figure 2-17. Oregon Amtrak Cascades on-time performance: 2021-2025[28]



Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025

2.4.3.3 Delays

During federal Fiscal Year 2025, the primary reported reasons Amtrak Cascades did not meet its on-time performance goal were:

- Freight train interference:
  - Conflicts occur 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.
- Temporary slow orders:
  - Slow orders can be issued during weather-related events or to accommodate track maintenance work.

[28] The data presented is based on the new federal standards for on-time performance. 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.

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- Passenger train interference:
    - Conflicts between Amtrak long-distance services and Amtrak Cascades can occur for similar infrastructural constraints as those for freight train interference.
- Amtrak equipment issues:
    - These issues include general equipment failures, which often are related to the increasing average age of Amtrak's national fleet. These issues are expected to decrease following the introduction of the new fleet of Airo trainsets.
- Crew and system issues:
    - Train crews had to be rehired in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus reducing the quantity of available personnel. Train crews also adhere to industry rules regarding limits on their working hours (hours of service), which can decrease their availability. Issues with hours of service can cause cascading delays when another service interruption occurs that causes one or more train crews to run out of hours of service.
- Passenger accessibility-related delays:
    - Delays resulting from the serving of disabled passengers, including the use of wheelchair lifts, and accommodation of guide dogs. These issues are expected to decrease following the introduction of the new fleet of Airo trainsets which include built-in wheelchair lifts.
- Unused recovery time:
    - Time spent idle at a station waiting for a train's scheduled departure time. These delays occur when a train does not need the recovery time built into the schedule and arrives at a station earlier than scheduled.

2.4.3.4 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 between Portland's Union Station and Eugene 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 Amtrak Cascades route can support passenger speeds of up to 79 mph, and the overall average speed is 42 mph. Reasons for this low average speed are several but are primarily caused by track geometry, speed restrictions, dwell time at stations (the amount of time a train is stopped serving a station), and accommodation for meeting and passing freight traffic. A comprehensive set of infrastructure improvements has been previously identified by ODOT in partnership with Union Pacific, Amtrak and the Federal Railroad Administration, which would allow for the provision of up to six Amtrak Cascades round trips in addition to the daily *Coast Starlight* round trip. These projects are discussed further in Chapter 3 of the State Rail Plan and are detailed in the Rail Needs Inventory (see Appendix C).

Distances between markets, population growth, and limited highway capacity make the Amtrak Cascades corridor, including the Eugene-Portland segment, well suited for successful passenger

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rail service. However, achieving the full potential of this service will require addressing three key constraints: frequency, travel times and reliability, and connectivity. 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. The three key constraints are:

- **Frequency:** The current two Amtrak Cascades round trips 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 schedule gaps and provide high-quality intercity bus service with air conditioning, electrical outlets and Wi-Fi, but they do not provide the same level of comfort and amenities that are available on the trains.
- **Travel times and reliability:** As mentioned above, scheduled passenger rail travel time between Eugene and Portland is 2 hours and 35 minutes (not including any delays) in 2026. 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 connectivity between stations and the public transportation system 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 Union Pacific and BNSF is necessary to ensure efficient and reliable passenger rail service. There are significant questions and challenges to resolve for improving infrastructure in the future; however, as explored in Chapter 3, ODOT has worked closely with these host railroads, particularly Union Pacific, to develop plans that will accommodate future freight and passenger services.

The 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 and Eugene in Oregon, in Seattle-Tacoma and Bellingham, Washington, and in Vancouver, British Columbia. Most trips along the corridor are by private automobile, with air playing a much smaller role except in the Vancouver, British Columbia, market.

2.4.3.5 Rolling Stock

Beginning in late 2026, the Amtrak Cascades trains will be re-equipped with new rolling stock replacing the current blended fleet of Talgo 8 trainsets and Amfleet railcars. The new rolling stock is a fleet of Airo trainsets produced by Siemens Mobility for Amtrak's intercity corridor services. Pictured in **Figure 2-18** below, the trainsets, designed with accessibility in mind, will improve rider experience by offering wider aisles, large bathrooms, built-in wheelchair lifts and wide, sealed gangways with automatic doors between cars. The trainsets will also provide

improved amenities such as larger tray tables, enhanced Wi-Fi connectivity, and water dispensers. Equipment availability rates are expected to increase with the introduction of the Airo fleet and completion of an expansion of Amtrak's Seattle maintenance facility in which the fleet will be maintained.[29]

Figure 2-18. An Airo trainset making a test run along the Amtrak Cascades corridor between Seattle, Washington, and Portland, Oregon

2.4.4 Amtrak *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder*

2.4.4.1 Ridership

Figure 2-19 shows ridership for the *Coast Starlight* and the *Empire Builder* for 2016 through 2025. Amtrak's long-distance trains experienced less of a drop in ridership during the pandemic than its other business lines. This phenomenon was due partially 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* also experienced a slower recovery in the wake of the pandemic than Amtrak Cascades did. Given the high prices and load factors these services experienced, indicating strong demand, this slower recovery is largely a result of 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.

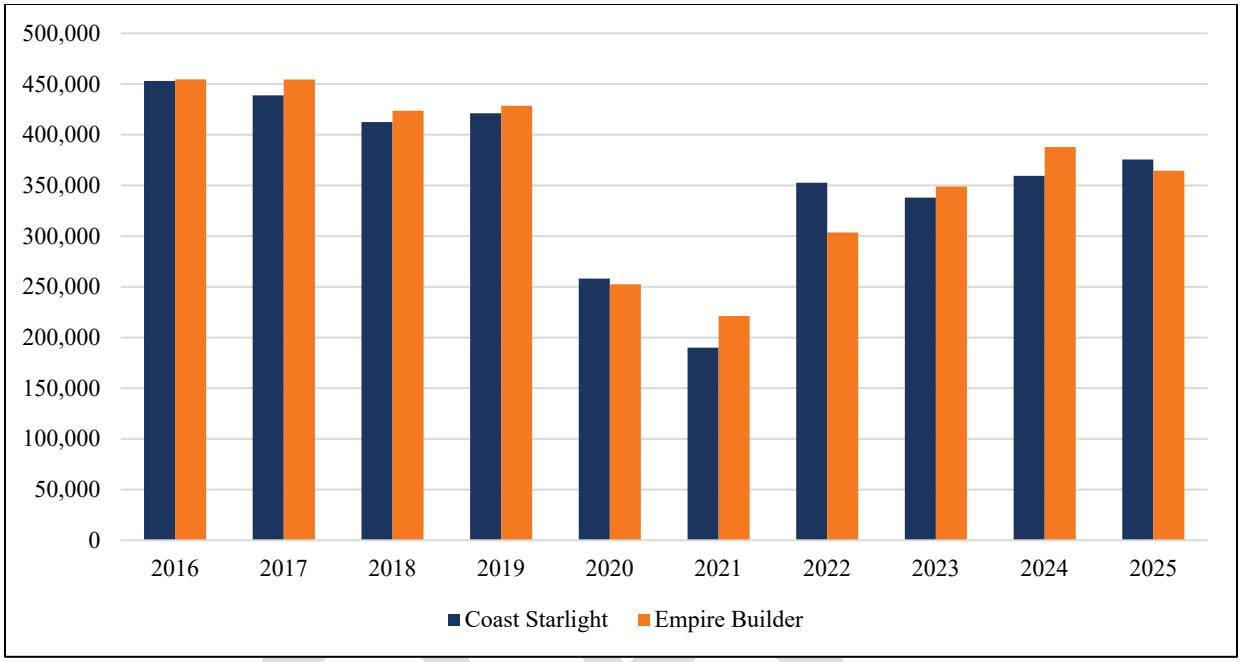
As shown in **Figure 2-20**, Amtrak *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder* passenger boardings at stations in and near Oregon vary and can be disproportionately high compared to the station city population, as in Klamath Falls, Oregon (ridership in FY 2025 was 26,103[30]; the population of

[29] https://amtrakoregon.com/discover/Maintenance_facility

[30] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/OREGON25.pdf

Klamath Falls is about 22,000[31]) and in Chemult, Oregon (ridership in FY 2025 was 2,610[32]; the population of Chemult is about 80[33]).

Figure 2-19. Amtrak *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder* ridership



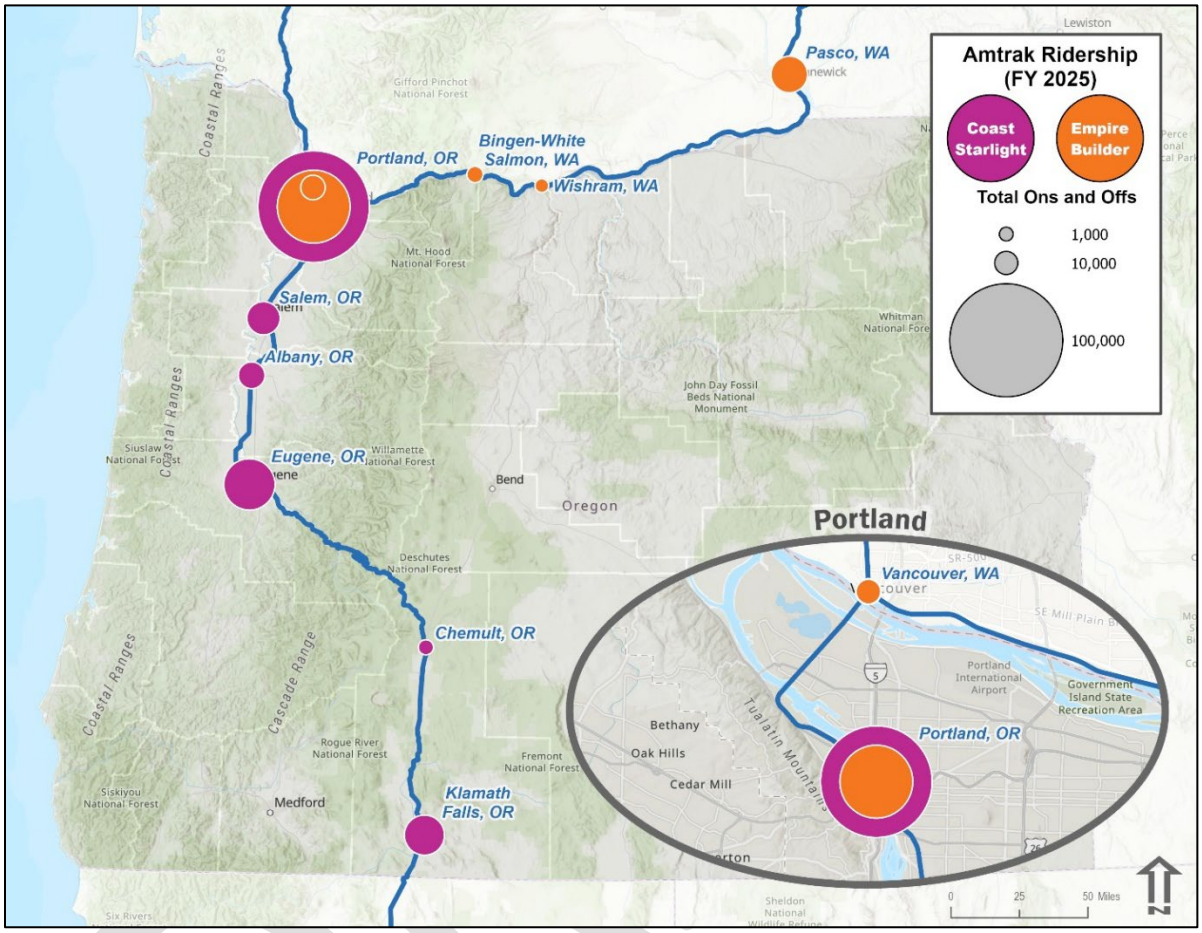
Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025

[31] https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/klamathfallscityoregon/PST045225

[32] https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/OREGON25.pdf

[33] https://hub.arcgis.com/datasets/esri::census-designated-place/explore?location=43.215189%2C-121.781037%2C15

Figure 2-20. *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder* station boardings in the Pacific Northwest



Source: Amtrak and ODOT, 2025

2.4.4.2 On-time performance

The *Coast Starlight* customer on-time performance averaged 60 percent[34] during Fiscal Year 2025, below the 80 percent standard for endpoint on-time performance established by the Federal Railroad Administration.

The *Empire Builder* failed to meet endpoint on-time performance standards during the same period; its customer on-time performance during Fiscal Year 2025 was approximately 53 percent.[35]

34 https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/OREGON25.pdf

35 https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/OREGON25.pdf

2.4.4.3 Delays

The *Coast Starlight* failed to meet the service delay performance targets recommended by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act for all quarters of Fiscal Year 2025. The top causes of host-responsible delays were delays from freight train interference, temporary slow orders, meeting or following other passenger trains, and unscheduled communications and signal activity.[36],[37] The most frequent Amtrak-responsible delays were issues with passengers, crew availability, train servicing and locomotive failure[38].

The *Empire Builder* similarly failed to meet the service delay performance targets recommended by the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act for all quarters of Fiscal Year 2025. The top causes of host-responsible delays were freight train interference followed distantly by slow order delays and meeting or following other passenger trains. The most frequent Amtrak-responsible delays were crew availability, train servicing, locomotive failure, issues with passengers, and late arrival of equipment from previous trains.[39]

2.4.4.4 Challenges

Long-distance train services 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: (1) service availability (given the short trains with fewer cars and ensuing high prices), and (2) service reliability (given the poor on-time performance). 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 is aging. With the original Superliner fleet dating to the late 1970s, it is overdue for replacement.

2.4.5 Safety and security of passenger rail

Ensuring the safety and security of the passenger rail system is of the highest importance. 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

[36] Unplanned communications and signal activity can include things such as signal failure or other signal delays, wayside defect detector false alarms, defective road crossing protection, efficiency tests, or drawbridges stuck open.

[37] https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/passenger-rail/amtrak/intercity-passenger-rail-service-quality-and

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

passenger operations, most injuries are associated with slips and falls at stations and on moving equipment. In most instances, these injuries are minor.

Typically, issues related to 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. Improvement of platform surfaces can help prevent injuries to rail passengers boarding and alighting from trains. 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 2-8** presents all Oregon highway-rail crossing incidents and fatalities for Amtrak between 2020 and 2025.

Table 2-8. Amtrak 2020-2025 Federal Railroad Administration highway-rail crossing incidents and fatalities in Oregon

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

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2.4.6 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, as shown in **Figure 2-21**, is Oregon's only commuter rail service and has served the Portland metropolitan area since February 2009. It operates a weekday service over a 14.7-mile route serving five stations: Beaverton, Hall/Nimbus, Tigard, Tualatin and Wilsonville. Weekday frequencies consist of 10 round trips, with 5 round trips 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.

The Westside Express Service is operated by the Portland & Western Railroad through a purchase of service agreement with Portland's TriMet (the regional transit agency), which funds the service, sets schedules and other standards, and owns a fleet of five self-propelled rail diesel cars and one trailer coach. It provides direct connections to Portland's MAX light rail service. Passengers can transfer from commuter rail service to the MAX Red Line and Blue Line at the Beaverton Transit Center.

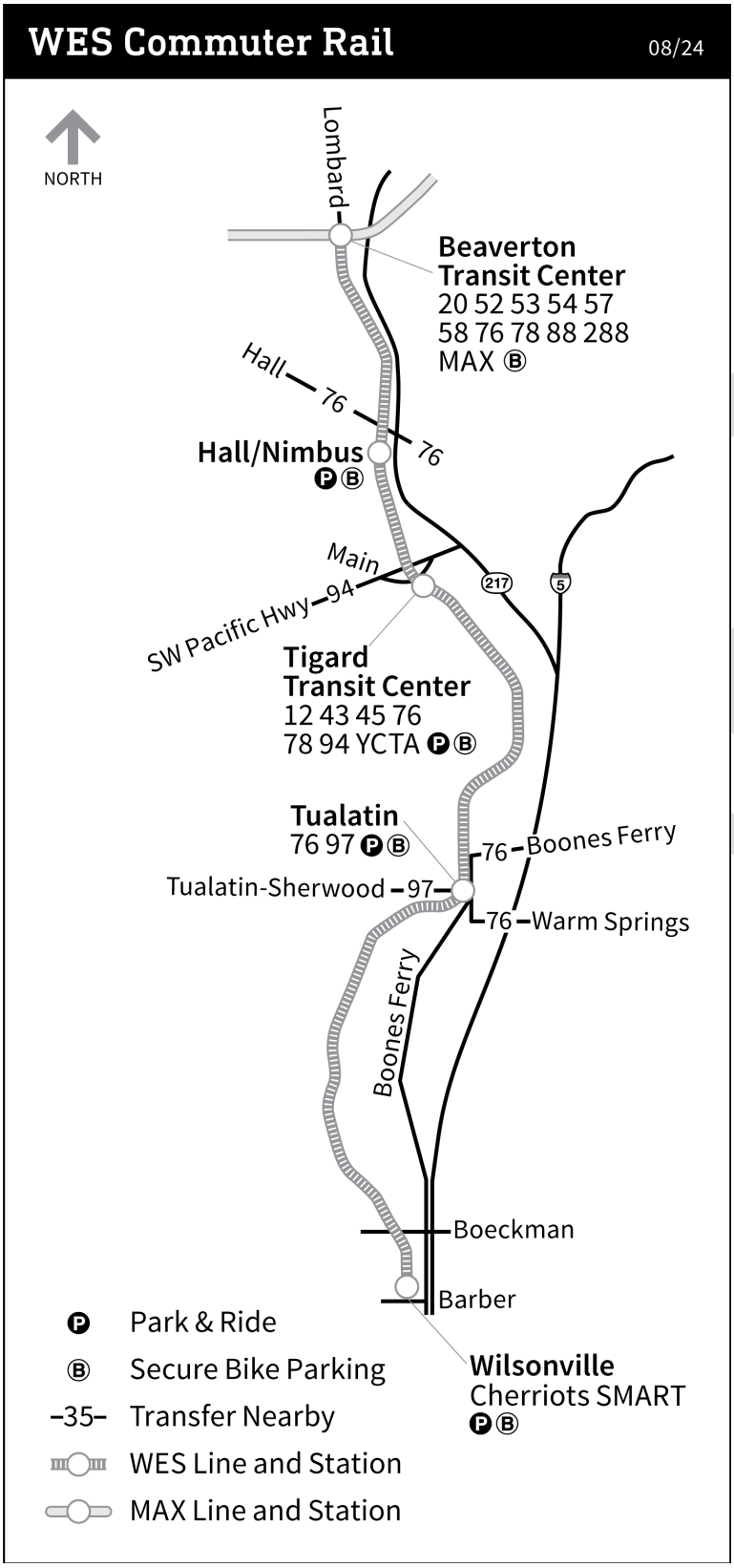
Figure 2-22 summarizes passenger boardings and farebox recovery ratios for Westside Express Service since operations began in 2009 and up through 2024. Boarding rides began at about 124,000 in 2009 and peaked at just over 512,000 in 2014. The first full year of the COVID-19 pandemic (2021), however, 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 inception of the service.

Fare recovery ratio trends have followed a similar trajectory. The fare recovery ratio was approximately 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 Westside Express Service; Commuter rail ridership has dropped significantly across the United States. Many commuter rail services are now looking at various options[40] to increase ridership:

- Expanding service hours beyond traditional commuting hours.
- Offering free fares and flexible passes, such as "youth passes," for certain passengers.
- 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.

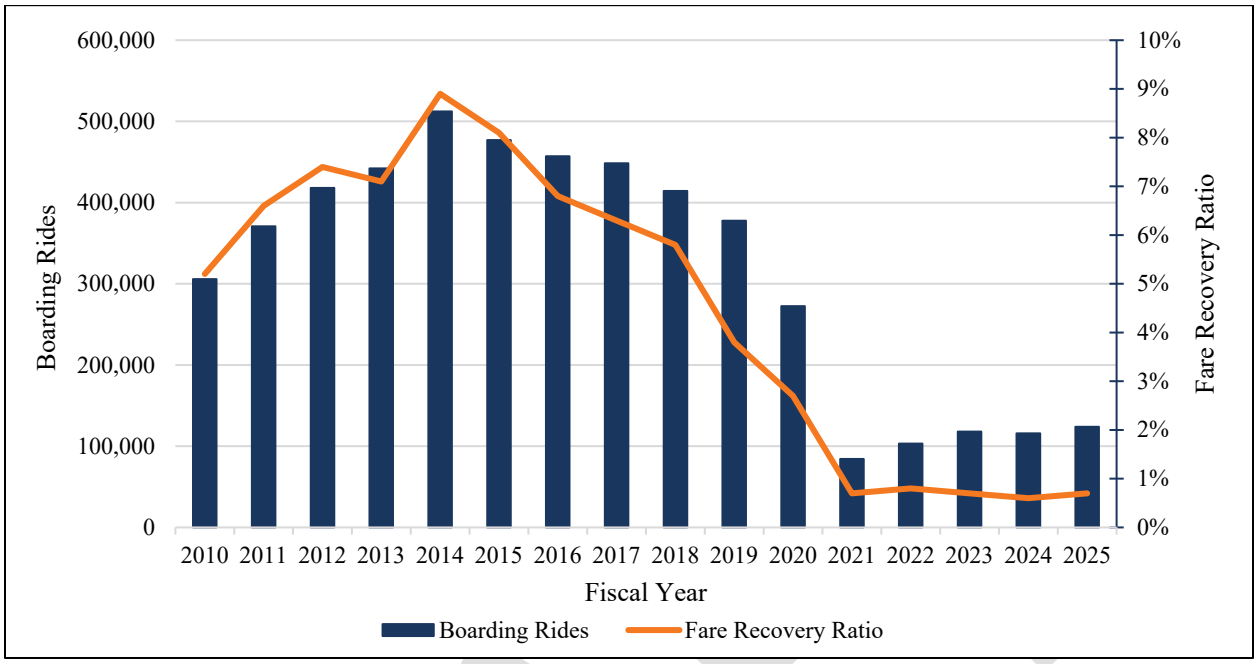
[40] U.S. Government Accounting Office. *Most Commuter Rail Systems Are Still Struggling Post-Pandemic,* May 8, 2025.

Figure 2-21. TriMet Map: Westside Express Service route and stations



Source: TriMet, 2025

Figure 2-22. Westside Express Service ridership and fare recovery ratios Fiscal Years 2010 to 2025



Source: TriMet, 2025

Table 2-9 presents the highway-rail crossing incidents for Westside Express Service from 2020 to 2025. There was only one incident in 2020, and there were no incidents from 2021 to 2025.

Table 2-9. Westside Express Service 2020-2025 Federal Railroad Administration highway-rail crossing incidents and fatalities

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

2.4.7 Conclusion

Oregon's rail system is a vital component of the state's multimodal transportation network, supporting economic competitiveness, community connectivity, and regional mobility through an integrated system of freight and passenger rail services. The statewide network of Class I and short-line railroads, intermodal facilities and passenger services connects Oregon's industries, ports and communities to national and international markets while providing essential travel options for residents and visitors. Although the system continues to demonstrate strong value, it also faces challenges related to aging infrastructure, capacity constraints, reliability, safety, and changing travel and freight demand. Understanding the existing conditions, performance and needs of Oregon's rail system provides the foundation for identifying future investments and strategies that will preserve, modernize, and strengthen the rail network in support of the state's long-term transportation, economic and environmental goals.

Chapter 3. Rail System Issues and Opportunities

Chapter 3 reviews the benefits and factors that drive the demand for rail services in Oregon, identifies key trends regarding population, employment, economic output (Gross Domestic Product), international trade and important freight-intensive industries. The chapter then presents how these trends may impact demand on both the freight and passenger rail systems, what that may mean for future rail system issues and opportunities, and finally, what actions Oregon may take to respond.

3.1 Impacts of rail transportation

3.1.1 Rail transportation benefits

This section outlines safety, demographic, climate, mobility, and economic benefits of rail in Oregon. It then outlines rail trends through equipment availability and other forecasts.

3.1.1.1 Safety

Rail transportation provides a substantially higher level of safety than automobile and truck travel.

Freight rail is approximately five times safer than truck transportation.[1] On a ton-mile (one ton of freight moved one mile) basis, the fatality rate for truck freight was 0.24 per 100 million ton-miles, compared to 0.05 for rail freight. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation Bureau of Transportation Statistics, between 2018 and 2023, trucks accounted for 32,313 fatalities, representing 85.7 percent of all freight transportation fatalities nationwide and 12.9 percent of all highway fatalities.[2] The vast majority of these incidents involved passenger vehicle occupants traveling on highways. In contrast, rail accounted for 5,100 fatalities, or 13.6 percent of freight transportation fatalities during the same period. The vast majority of rail fatalities nationwide involve trespassers on railroad rights of way (~60 percent of all incidents) and grade crossing incidents (~30 percent of all incidents) – which are by extension also associated with highway safety.

Safety within the railroad industry has also improved significantly over time.[3] On-duty fatalities declined by 64 percent between 2005 and 2024, averaging fewer than 10 incidents annually over the past 5 years. Over the same period, the derailment rate for Class I railroads declined by 40 percent, while yard accidents decreased by 32 percent.[4]

Passenger rail is among the safest modes of ground transportation in the United States. From 2018 to 2023, Bureau of Transportation Statistics data shows that passenger rail experienced an

[1] Calculated based on the aforementioned fatality statistics and U.S. freight ton-mile data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, October 2025, https://www.bts.gov/content/us-ton-miles-freight.

[2] U.S. Department of Transportation, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Freight Facts and Figures (Washington, DC, 2025), https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/Freight-Transportation-Safety/vu39-vtqh/.

[3] American Journal of Transportation, "FRA data confirms rail safety progress with record-low injury and accident rates," , March 6, 2025, https://www.ajot.com/news/fra-data-confirms-rail-safety-progress-with-record-low-injury-and-accident-rates#:~:text=Newlypercent20releasedpercent202024percent20datapercent20from,overpercent20thepercent20pastpercent205percent20years.

[4] American Railroad Association. Facts and Figures, October 2025, https://www.aar.org/resources/#!.

average fatality rate of less than 0.5 deaths per billion passenger-miles, compared with more than 13.9 deaths per billion vehicle-miles for motor vehicles.[5] On a passenger-mile basis, passenger rail is therefore approximately 28 times safer than motor vehicle travel. This is especially significant, as approximately half of passenger rail ridership in Oregon would otherwise be trips in personal automobiles.[6]

3.1.1.2 Demographic

Some communities experience disproportionate transportation-related impacts due to system design, historic development patterns, and economic conditions. Notably, five out of Oregon's seven Amtrak stations and four out of five TriMet commuter rail stations are located within one-half mile of underserved census tract areas, representing a substantially higher share than the statewide average. According to a 2021 ODOT memorandum, low-income residents are more likely to rely on walking and transit due to the high cost of vehicle ownership, which increases exposure to traffic-related risks.[7] These communities are also more likely to live in areas with higher traffic volumes, limited street connectivity, and fewer pedestrian safety features, resulting in pedestrian fatality rates more than twice those observed in higher-income areas. Although only 24 percent of Oregon's population lives in census tracts with high concentrations of lower-income households, these areas account for about 40 percent of total pedestrian injuries statewide. ODOT attributes this gap to a more challenging transportation environment, characterized by arterial traffic densities nearly three times higher and high-speed roadway mileage roughly double that of the lowest-risk areas.

To evaluate how rail investment can help address these system-level gaps, an access analysis was conducted in the fall of 2025 for this Rail Plan using the United States Department of Transportation's Areas of Persistent Poverty designation at the census tract and county level. Under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Areas of Persistent Poverty are defined based on sustained high poverty rates. Specifically, an *Area of Persistent Poverty* is a location meeting one or more of the following criteria:[8]

- The county has maintained a poverty rate of 20 percent or higher in the 1990 and 2000 decennial censuses and the 2022 Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates;
- The census tract has a poverty rate of at least 20 percent, according to the 2014–2018 American Community Survey 5-year estimates; or
- The project is located within a United States territory or possession.

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[5] Passenger fatality per billion of train-miles is calculated from data from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, October 2025, https://www.bts.gov/content/railroad-passenger-safety-data. Fatality rate per billion of vehicle-miles for motor vehicles is calculated from data from the National Safety Council, October 2025, https://injuryfacts.nsc.org/motor-vehicle/historical-fatality-trends/deaths-and-rates/.

[6] Amtrak Oregon State Economic Impact Brochure: https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/stateeconomicimpactbrochures/Oregon-fy16.pdf.

[7] Oregon Department of Transportation, 2021. Pedestrian Injury and Social Equity in Oregon, January 19, 2021, https://www.oregon.gov/odot/Safety/Documents/Pedestrian_Safety_and_Social_Equity.pdf.

[8] U.S. Department of Transportation, Areas of Persistent Poverty and Historically Disadvantaged Communities, October 2025, https://www.transportation.gov/grants/mpdg-areas-persistent-poverty-and-historically-disadvantaged-communities-1 .

Population characteristic data was analyzed using United States Census Bureau and American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates in geospatial analysis software ArcGIS. The analysis focused on Oregon's two primary passenger rail services: Amtrak Cascades intercity rail and TriMet's Westside Express Service commuter rail.[9] Because this analysis centers on Oregon's two primary passenger rail services—intercity and commuter—the geospatial data was obtained for the Amtrak Cascades intercity passenger rail line, [10] and the TriMet Westside Express Service in Portland.[11]

Of Oregon's 1,002 census tracts, 278 (28 percent) are designated as underserved and are home to approximately 27 percent of the state's population. These areas have more limited access to personal vehicles, with 10.4 percent of households lacking a vehicle, which is 47 percent higher than the statewide average. **Figure 3-1.** illustrates the spatial relationship between passenger rail stations, areas of persistent poverty, and household vehicle access within Oregon.

These findings highlight the critical role rail can play in strengthening transportation access and system performance in Oregon. For households without reliable access to personal vehicles, passenger rail and transit provide essential connections to employment, education, healthcare, and other daily needs. Strategic investment in rail infrastructure, station accessibility, and service expansion can help close mobility gaps, reduce household transportation costs, and enhance safety by reducing reliance on walking and travel along high-traffic roadways.

Freight rail contributes to broad-based economic opportunity and system efficiency by supporting access to stable, well-paying jobs by reducing community impacts associated with highway freight movement. Many rail industry occupations—such as locomotive engineers, conductors, and maintenance workers—do not require a college degree, creating pathways to family-supporting employment across urban and rural communities alike. In Oregon, where income imbalances and geographic gaps in job access remain significant, the freight rail sector plays a critical role in supporting economic vitality, particularly in rural areas and smaller communities located along key rail corridors. By incentivizing a shift in freight movement from highways to rail or at minimum insuring rail loses no market share, freight rail investments can also reduce impacts to certain areas of persistent poverty by reducing the number of truck trips in communities located near major freight routes. Reducing exposure to truck traffic can significantly decrease road safety risks, as well as noise and air pollution as discussed in the next section.

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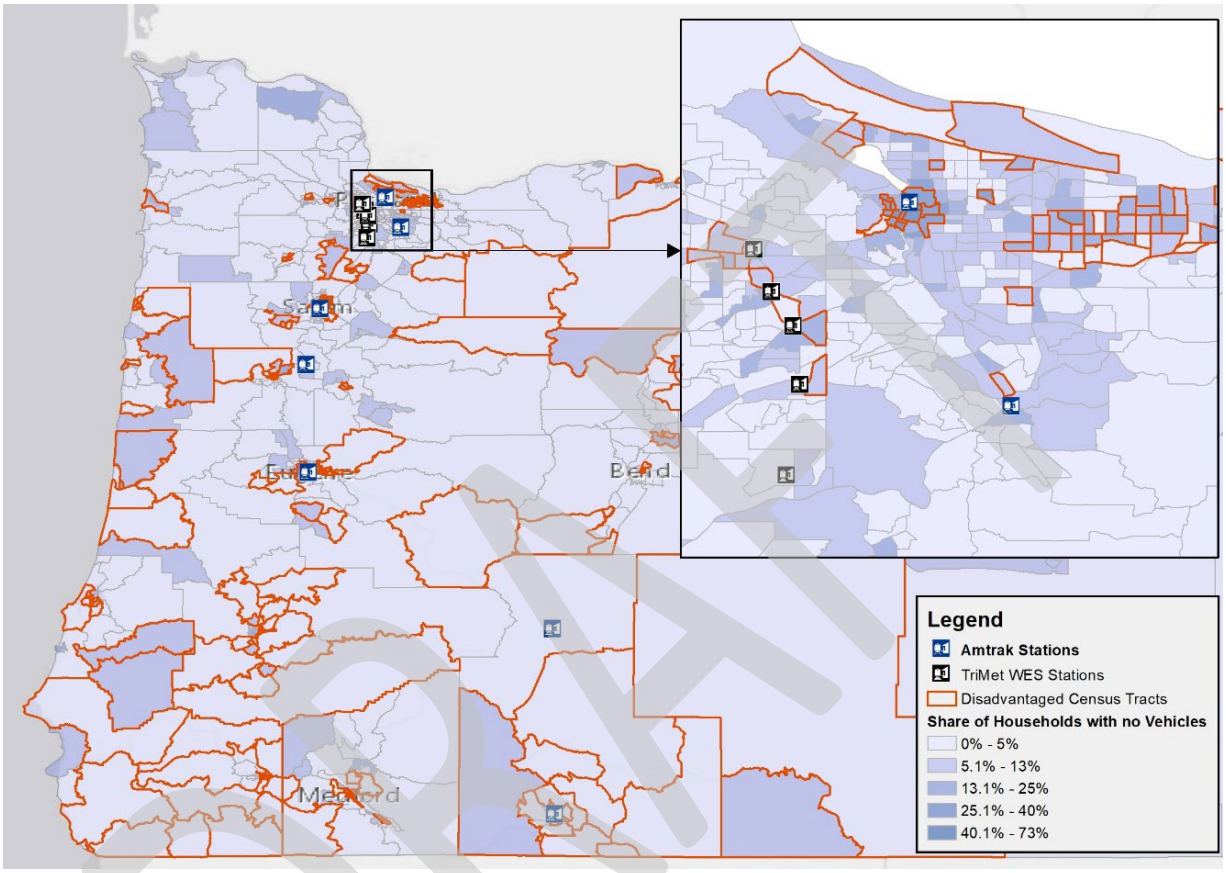
[9] U.S. Census Bureau. TIGER/Line with Selected Demographic and Economic Data Record Layouts, October 2025, https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/technical-documentation/records-layout/tiger-line-demo-record-layouts.html.

[10] U.S. Department of Transportation, Geospatial data at the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, October 2025, https://data-usdot.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/amtrak-stations/explore?location=35.193029percent2C-96.479162percent2C5.24 .

[11] TriMet Geospatial Data, October 2025, https://developer.trimet.org/gis/.

Figure 3-1. Share of households without vehicles in western Oregon and Portland area



Source: WSP USA, Inc. analysis of the American Census Survey's 2019-2023 5-Year Estimate, United States Department of Transportation's Areas of Persistent Poverty Census Tracts.[12]

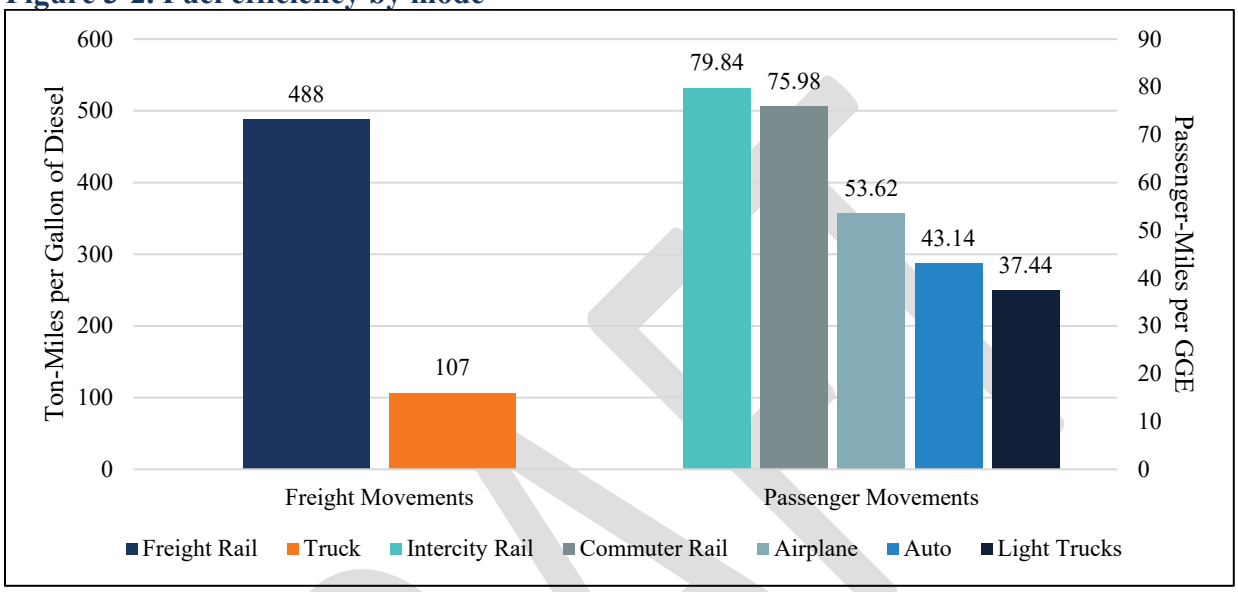
3.1.1.3 Climate

Rail transportation plays a critical role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions by moving both freight and passengers more efficiently than highway and air travel. Freight rail is three to four times more fuel efficient than trucking, with Class I railroads carrying an average of 488 ton-miles per gallon of fuel compared to approximately 107 ton-miles per gallon of fuel for trucks (**Figure 3-2**).[13] As a result, rail significantly reduces fuel consumption costs and carbon emissions associated with freight movement. See the Comparative Analysis in Section 3.2.4.5 for a discussion on the cost implications of this difference.

[12] MPDG - Areas of Persistent Poverty and Historically Disadvantaged Communities | US Department of Transportation, 2019-2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates.

[13] Rail fuel efficiency from Table 4-17: Class I Rail Freight Fuel Consumption and Travel, October 2025, https://www.bts.gov/content/class-i-rail-freight-fuel-consumption-and-travel, Bureau of Transportation Statistics, Data from 2023. Truck fuel efficiency calculated based on Class 8 Truck fuel economy of 5.7 miles per gallon from U.S. Department of Energy, Alternative Fuels Data Center, October 2025, https://afdc.energy.gov/data, and average truckload for distance greater than 500 miles of 18.8 tons, from Quick Response Freight Manual II (2007), FHWA Publication Number: FHWA-HOP-08_010 (EDL 14396), October 2025, https://rosap.ntl.bts.gov/view/dot/67831.

Figure 3-2. Fuel efficiency by mode



Passenger rail is significantly more fuel efficient than roadway and air travel. Intercity passenger rail typically achieves nearly 80 passenger-miles per gallon of gasoline-equivalent and commuter rail approximately 76 passenger-miles per gallon of gasoline-equivalent, compared to 53 passenger-miles per gallon of gasoline-equivalent for airplanes, 43 for passenger cars, and 37 for light trucks, (see **Figure 3-2**).[14] In fiscal year 2024, Amtrak passengers boarding or alighting the train in Oregon accounted for approximately 219 million passenger-miles of rail travel, calculated by multiplying total Oregon Amtrak ridership by the average per-passenger trip distance reported for Oregon routes. TriMet commuter rail passengers traveled an additional 900,000 miles.[15] If these trips had instead been made by personal vehicles, they would have required the equivalent of nearly 2.8 million gallons of fuel annually and generated more than 24,600 metric tons of CO_2 compared to rail travel, corresponding to an estimated social cost exceeding $6 million.[16]

Continued advancements in rail technology are expected to further improve fuel efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions over time. Freight railroads are deploying advanced locomotive

[14] Alternative Fuels Data Center's Average Per-Passenger Fuel Economy by Travel Mode, October 2025.

[15] Amtrak ridership in Oregon for fiscal year 2024 from Amtrak, Amtrak in Oregon Fact Sheet, fiscal year 2024, https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/OREGON24.pdf, multiplied by average trip distance from Rail Passengers Association, Amtrak in Oregon Fact Sheet, fiscal year 2022, https://www.railpassengers.org/site/assets/files/1210/or.pdf. TriMet Commuter Rail passenger miles from National Transit Database, 2023 Annual Agency Profile - Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2023/00008.pdf.

[16] CO2 is calculated based on 8,887 grams of CO2 per gallon of gasoline factor recommended by the Environmental Protection Agency's Greenhouse Gas Equivalency Calculator, https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator-calculations-and-references. The associated value is calculated based on United States Department of Transportation's 2024 Benefit-Cost Analysis Guidance, reflecting the undiscounted CO2 value for 2025 in 2023 dollars.

fuel management systems that can improve efficiency by up to 14 percent,[17] as well as stop-start technologies that significantly reduce idling and fuel consumption. The railroad industry is also piloting battery-electric and hydrogen fuel cell locomotive pilots, expanding the use of renewable fuels, and introducing hybrid locomotive combinations that recover braking energy to reduce emissions by up to 30 percent by combining diesel- and battery-electric technologies.

Passenger rail operators are similarly advancing emissions reduction efforts. Amtrak has established a goal of achieving net-zero emissions by 2045 and is working with partners to research and deploy alternative propulsion technologies, including batteries, hydrogen, and fuel cells, while increasing energy efficiency and the use of carbon-free electricity.[18] New trainsets, such as Amtrak's Airo fleet debuting on the Amtrak Cascades corridor in late 2026, are more fuel-efficient than the equipment they replace, reinforcing passenger rail's role as a low-carbon transportation option.

3.1.1.4 Mobility

Rail strengthens Oregon's transportation system by expanding mobility options for both freight and passenger movement. For freight, rail provides a reliable option for high-volume, long-distance freight shipments, particularly for industries in rural areas that depend on moving large quantities of raw materials and may lack access to a fully developed highway network. Freight rail also plays a significant role in reducing the maintenance burden for roadway agencies like ODOT and county/municipal public works departments. By diverting freight movement growth from trucking, rail helps reduce state-of-good repair issues which can cause mobility problems for residents.

For passengers, intercity and commuter rail expand access to safe, dependable travel options for residents who cannot or choose not to drive, while also complementing highway and aviation systems by providing a dependable alternative for travel that offers an experience uniquely conducive to productive travel time, be it spent working or socializing. Passenger rail also provides a competitive and reliable option for short- and medium- distance trips, helping to relieve pressure on congested highways and airports. As Oregon plans for continued population and economic growth, expanding the passenger rail network is crucial for supporting a balanced multimodal transportation system that improves statewide connectivity and enhances mobility choices for residents and businesses alike.

3.1.1.5 Economic and community vitality

Passenger and freight rail support Oregon's economic and community vitality by enabling the efficient movement of people and goods; connecting residents to jobs, education, recreation, and services; and supporting industries that are foundational to the state's economy. Rail is particularly important for industries that depend on moving large volumes of goods over long distances, including forestry and logging, wood product manufacturing, and agriculture.

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[17] "How Freight Rail Helps Reduce Greenhous Gas Emissions", American Association of Railroads, https://www.aar.org/issue/freight-rail-climate-change/.

[18] Amtrak, "Amtrak Aims to Achieve Net Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2045," September 22, 2022, https://media.amtrak.com/2022/09/amtrak-aims-to-achieve-net-zero-greenhouse-gas-emissions-by-2045/.

Compared to the rest of the country, these industries are concentrated in Oregon and are uniquely rail-dependent.

Lumber or wood products account for approximately 41 percent of the freight shipped by rail in Oregon, while pulp, paper, and allied products represent an additional 8 percent.[19] Oregon is the nation's largest producer of softwood lumber and is home to approximately 30.5 million acres of forestland, covering nearly half the state.[20] Forestry and wood products employment is heavily concentrated in rural areas, where these industries provide stable, high-wage jobs that sustain local economies. In 2023, the forest sector supported approximately 62,300 jobs statewide, representing about 3 percent of total employment. In several rural counties—including Grant, Jefferson, Douglas, and Lake—forest-related jobs accounted for more than 10 percent of all employment.[21] Wages in the forest sector are also significantly higher than average, reaching up to 77 percent above typical wages in rural counties. Many occupations in the industry only require a high school diploma or equivalent, offering accessible pathways to economic mobility. For example, technical roles such as industrial machinery mechanics and electricians can earn an annual income of $70,000 or more.

Rail also contributes directly to employment and economic activity across Oregon. In 2022, freight railroads employed more than 1,300 Oregon residents, while approximately 8,000 railroad retirees living in the state received $189 million in annual pension benefits that are spent in local communities.[22]

Passenger rail operations similarly support jobs and local spending. In fiscal year 2025,[23] Amtrak operated three routes within Oregon and recorded nearly 863,000 passenger boardings and alightings (passengers exiting trains) at the state's seven stations. Amtrak employed more than 70 Oregon residents, paid more than $7.8 million in wages and salaries, and procured nearly $5.3 million in goods and services from Oregon businesses.

Commuter rail further supports regional economic vitality, particularly in the Portland metropolitan area. In 2024, TriMet provided approximately 114,000 commuter rail trips.[24] Across all divisions, TriMet employs approximately 3,600 workers with total annual wages exceeding $300 million and is budgeted to spend more than $260 million on materials and services in fiscal year 2025, generating substantial economic activity throughout the region.

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[19] Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample 2022.

[20] State of Oregon. Forest and Wood Products, October 2025, https://www.oregon.gov/biz/programs/homeareas/byboregon/targetindustries/pages/forestry.aspx?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

[21] State of Oregon. Employment Department, October 2025, https://www.qualityinfo.org/web/guest/data .

[22] Association of American Railroads, Oregon State Fact Sheet, Data from 2022 and 2023, https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/AAR-Oregon-State-Fact-Sheet.pdf.

[23] Amtrak State Fact Sheets, 2025, https://www.amtrak.com/content/dam/projects/dotcom/english/public/documents/corporate/statefactsheets/OREGON25.pdf.

[24] National Transit Database, 2024 Annual Agency Profile - Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/transit_agency_profile_doc/2024/00008.1.pdf .

Beyond these direct economic impacts, rail investment produces indirect and induced economic benefits for Oregon. Freight railroads, Amtrak, and TriMet purchase goods and services from businesses statewide, supporting supplier industries and creating indirect economic effects. Employees, contractors, and railroad retirement beneficiaries then spend their earnings in local economies, further amplifying economic activity through induced effects.

Rail infrastructure also strengthens Oregon's economic resilience by adding redundancy to the transportation network. By providing an alternative means of moving freight and passengers when highways are congested, disrupted, or under repair, rail reduces reliance on a single mode and helps maintain continuity of commerce. This redundancy enhances the state's ability to withstand severe weather events, accidents, infrastructure failures, and future growth pressures. Rail enhances the state's ability to respond to emergencies and adapt to future growth or unexpected challenges while supporting more resilient communities and a more stable statewide economy.

3.1.1.6 Stewardship of public resources

Oregon's multimodal freight system relies heavily on the highway network, which carries nearly 70 percent of all freight tonnage in the state, according to the United States Department of Transportation Freight Analysis Framework.[25] As truck volumes continue to grow, key highway corridors—particularly Interstate 5 through the Portland metropolitan area—experience significant congestion, safety issues, and accelerated infrastructure wear. Interchange areas such as I-5/I-84/I-405 and the I-5 intersection at the Columbia River function as major freight chokepoints. According to the American Transportation Research Institute's 2026 Top 100 Truck Bottlenecks list, Oregon's I-5 at I-84 and I-5 at the Columbia River crossing were ranked among the top 30 freight bottlenecks in the nation, reflecting significant congestion relative to other truck routes.[26] Enhancing rail capacity along parallel corridors offers an opportunity to reduce pressure on these heavily traveled highway segments by shifting long-haul and bulk freight to a more infrastructure-efficient mode.

Heavy truck traffic is a leading contributor to pavement deterioration on highways. Because pavement damage increases rapidly with axle weight, a single five-axle tractor-trailer can cause pavement wear equivalent to roughly 1,750-2,925 passenger vehicles on flexible pavements and about 10,600 passenger vehicles on rigid pavements.[27] Reducing heavy truck volumes can therefore yield substantial savings in pavement maintenance and rehabilitation. Diverting freight from trucks to rail is one of the most cost-effective ways to preserve highway infrastructure. Given that a single freight train can replace up to 300 trucks, strategic investment in rail capacity can help Oregon preserve highway infrastructure, alleviate roadway congestion, extend

[25] U.S. Department of Transportation. Freight Analysis Frame 5 Summary Statistics, Oregon, October 2025, https://faf.ornl.gov/faf5/SummaryTable.aspx .

[26] American Transport Research Institute. Top 100 Truck Bottlenecks – 2026, https://truckingresearch.org/2026/02/top-100-truck-bottlenecks-2026/.

[27] Bradley and Thiam. 2018. Analysis of car and truck pavement impacts. Retrieved from American Trucking Association, October 2025, https://www.trucking.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Analysispercent20ofpercent20carpercent20andpercent20truckpercent20pavementpercent20impacts-FINAL.pdf.

pavement life, reduce maintenance costs, improve safety and delay or avoid costly highway expansion, supporting more efficient stewardship of limited public transportation resources.[28]

3.2 Freight rail profile

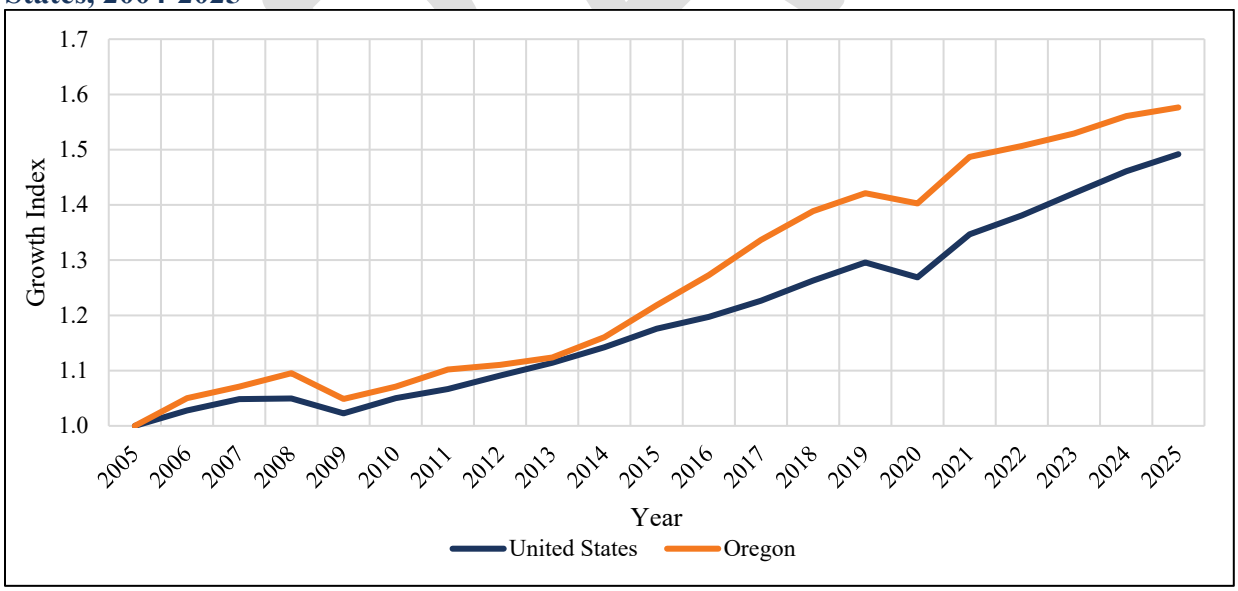
Oregon's ability to compete in national and global economic markets demands an effective and efficient transportation system that can deliver freight reliably. As a crossroads and a gateway for the U.S. Pacific Coast and western region, the efficiency and capacity of the rail system in Oregon is fundamental to the state's agriculture, manufacturing, timber and wood products, and logistics and distribution industries. Oregon's freight rail network needs to be able to accommodate growth and adapt to change to help position Oregon for future prosperity.

3.2.1 Freight demand trends

3.2.1.1 Macroeconomic trends

The pace of Oregon's economic growth, as measured by gross domestic product, will be a key indicator of overall freight demand in future decades. Oregon's economy as measured by gross domestic product (the value of goods and services produced by a state, region or country and a universal measure of economic size and activity) grew by over 60 percent between 2004 and 2025. That growth was greater than the roughly 50 percent increase in U.S. gross domestic product recorded over the same period (**Figure 3-3.**).

Figure 3-3. Real gross domestic product growth index, Oregon compared to the United States, 2004-2025



Source: U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

Oregon's employment levels have followed a similar trend. As of 2025, total employment stood at just under 2 million, showing a strong rebound since 2020, when employment fell from 1.95

[28] Association of American Railroads, 2020. The Positive Environmental Effects of Increased Freight by Rail Movements in America, https://www.aar.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/AAR-Positive-Environmental-Effects-of-Freight-Rail-White-Paper-62020.pdf.

million to 1.83 million during the COVID-19 pandemic[29]. This increase in employment reflects Oregon's resilient labor market and overall economy.

While the expansion of gross domestic product and employment are valid measures of overall economic growth, people ultimately need higher income levels to justify increased consumption, one of the primary drivers of transportation demand. Overall, per-capita income growth has lagged the U.S., despite the rapid growth in productivity; per-capita personal income reached $76,384 in 2025[30]. Oregon has followed close behind, with a per-capita personal income reaching $70,685 in 2025[31].

3.2.2 Freight rail market share

Figure 3-4 illustrates a long-term decline in monthly carload traffic over the past 25 years. Shaded gray areas on **Figure 3-4** represent economic recessions, including the 2002 Dot-Com Recession, the 2008 Great Recession, and the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. While certain market segments, such as intermodal, have grown, overall carload volumes across the industry continue to decline.

The relative benefits of rail versus highway transportation depend on the comparative growth rates of rail and trucking. As shown in **Figure 3-5,** between 2014 and 2024, rail volumes declined approximately 20 percent, while truck volumes increased by a similar amount.[32] Volumes are measured as ton-miles (one ton of freight moved one mile), suggesting a modal shift from rail to truck.

Figure 3-4. Rail freight carloads[33]

Source: Surface Transportation Board Annual R-1 Reports via U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics

[29] https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Pages/forecastecorev.aspx

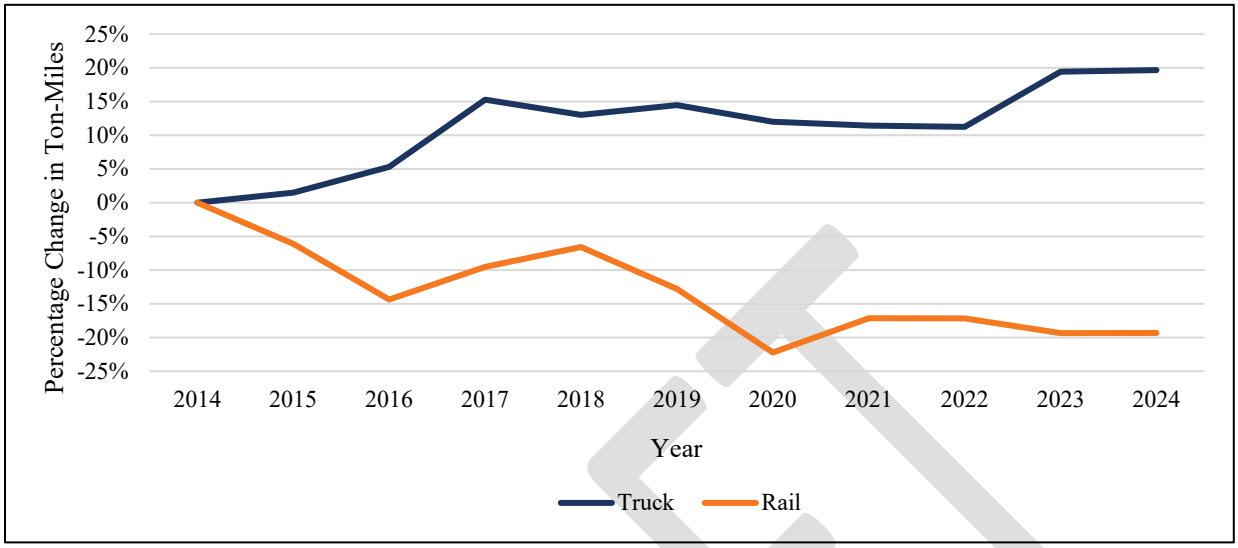
[30] https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/A792RC0A052NBEA

[31] https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/ORPCPI

[32] U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics, National Transportation Statistics, U.S. Ton-Miles of Freight, https://www.bts.gov/content/us-ton-miles-freight.

[33] Shaded areas indicate periods of economic recession in the United States.

Figure 3-5. Percentage change in truck and rail ton-miles since 2014



Source: Bureau of Transportation Statistics

A primary driver of declining rail volumes nationally is the reduction in coal shipments. Over the past 25 years, many coal-fired power plants have been decommissioned or converted to natural gas, driven in part by lower natural gas prices resulting from expanded domestic production, such as the expansion of fracking operations across the United States. In 2000, coal accounted for approximately 25 percent of railroad revenue; by July 2025, that share declined to approximately 8.5 percent.

An indirect driver of declining volumes over the past decade, shareholder pressure has led many Class I railroads to prioritize lower operating ratios (total operating expenses divided by total revenues) over freight volume growth by implementing an operating strategy known as Precision Scheduled Railroading. While approaches vary by railroad, Precision Scheduled Railroading generally includes workforce reductions, longer trains, asset rationalization, and network simplification. Examples include combining train types (such as intermodal and merchandise traffic), operating longer trains with distributed locomotive power, closing classification yards (where merchandise railcars are sorted into blocks and organized into new trains or routed for local delivery), and de-marketing lower-margin traffic in favor of higher-yield customers.

As a result, the rail industry is moving less freight overall while generating higher revenue per unit of service by prioritizing higher paying customers over less profitable freight. A March 2023 study by Oliver Wyman found that the four leading U.S. Class I Railroads (BNSF Railway, Union Pacific Railroad, CSX Transportation, Norfolk Southern) increased revenue per train-mile from $91 to $195 between 2006 and 2021, while revenue ton-miles and total train-miles declined by 15 percent and 24 percent, respectively.[34]

These trends have drawn increased regulatory scrutiny. In 2021, the Surface Transportation Board reported that between 2010 and 2021, the five U.S.-based Class I railroads spent

[34] "The Future of the Industry is Up For Grabs, Consultant Says" Trains Magazine April 3, 2024, https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/the-future-of-the-rail-industry-is-up-for-grabs-consultant-says/

$191 billion on share buybacks and dividends, compared with $138 billion on capital expenditures. Between 2002 and 2021, railroads lost approximately 2 percent of freight market share to trucking. Because each 1 percent shift from rail to truck is estimated to result in approximately 5 million additional tons of CO_2 emissions, this modal shift has contributed an estimated 123 million tons of additional CO_2 emissions. Former Surface Transportation Board Chair Martin Oberman summarized regulatory concerns by stating, "This cannot be allowed to continue".[35]

Railroad networks have undergone significant change in recent years, particularly among carriers pursuing Precision Scheduled Railroading strategies. Examples include Union Pacific's closure of the hump yard in Hinkle, Oregon and the Pine Bluff yard in Arkansas, as well as the redirection of capital away from the Brazos classification yard project in Texas which was begun but not completed. Other classification yards have been closed and re-opened over relatively short timeframes, such as Norfolk Southern's Bellevue Yard. At the same time, Class I railroads have increasingly combined train types to improve utilization of crews and network capacity, for example by placing intermodal cars in manifest trains as opposed to operating them on express schedules in unit trains. The U.S. freight rail system continues to evolve in response to shifting traffic patterns, management strategies, and shareholders' priorities. These changes have implications for safety and regulatory compliance.

Discussion of freight analysis forecast limitations

The rail commodity flow forecasts included in this Rail Plan are based on projections developed for the Federal Highway Administration Freight Analysis Framework, Version 5. Forecasted rates of change in commodity consumption and production were applied to rail flow estimates from the Surface Transportation Board carload waybill sample to derive future rail freight flows. The waybill sample represents an even 10 percent sample of all carload movements 2 years after the Surface Transportation Board issues them. Correspondingly, data sourced from the waybill sample in this Rail Plan dates to 2022. Some projected trends were then validated using real-time RailState data collected by cameras capturing train movements on Oregon's rail network between 2025 and 2026.

It is important to note that these forecasts are tied to macroeconomic indicators and do capture all factors affecting rail demand. Under Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 assumptions, growth in Oregon's economy implies proportional growth in commodities that serve as inputs to, or outputs from, the overall economy. However, the forecasts do not account for changes in supply or demand unrelated to broader economic trends. For example, forest products represent a key commodity group for Oregon's rail network, yet Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 does not account for changes in timber supply or substitutions between Pacific Northwest lumber and alternative construction materials. As a result, Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 projections may overstate future rail freight volume changes for major local commodities.

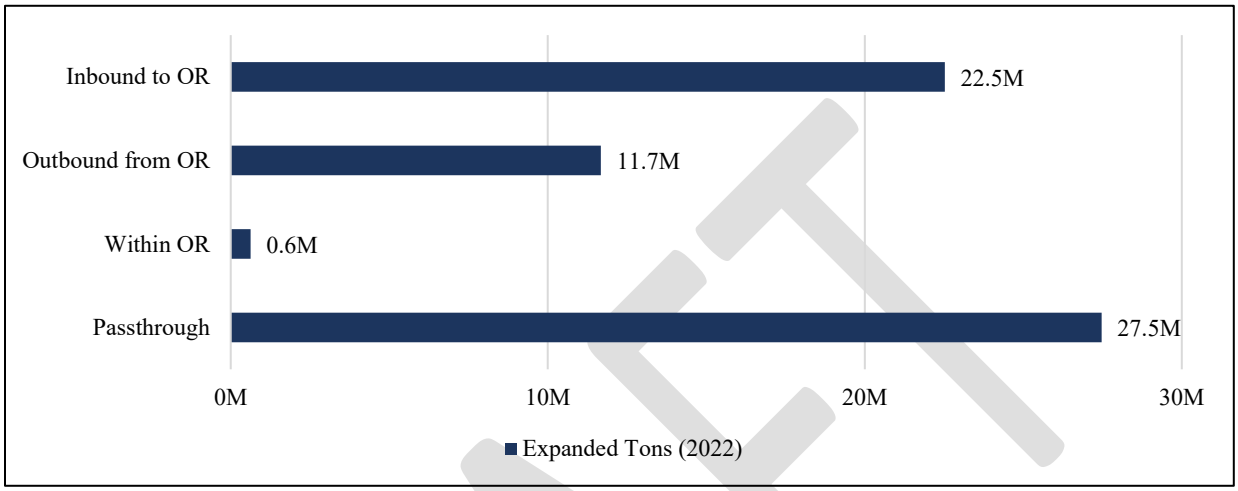
3.2.3 Rail freight volumes and flows

According to Surface Transportation Board data, in 2022, 62.3 million tons of rail freight moved to, from, within, or through Oregon (**Figure 3-6**). The largest direction of flow was passthrough,

[35] https://www.trains.com/trn/news-reviews/news-wire/top-regulator-urges-railroads-to-focus-on-growth/

which describes freight that passed through Oregon between other states, accounting for 44 percent (27.5 million tons) of total tonnage. Inbound freight accounted for significantly more traffic than outbound freight, with 36 percent (22.5 million tons) of total tonnage terminating in Oregon compared to 19 percent (11.7 million tons) originating in the state. Intrastate traffic (within Oregon) only accounted for 1 percent (0.6 million tons) of freight traffic by tonnage.

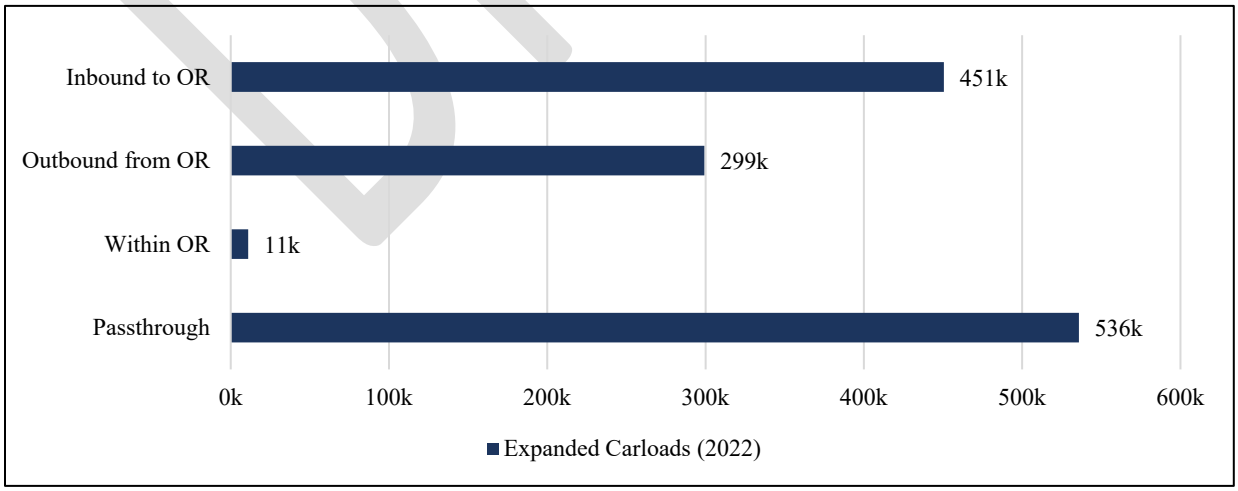
Figure 3-6. Oregon rail tons by direction of flow, 2022



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

Patterns are similar when traffic is measured not by ton but by carload (**Figure 3-7**). In 2022 the Oregon rail network carried 1.3 million carloads of freight. Passthrough freight accounted for the highest proportion of carloads at 41 percent (536,000 carloads). Inbound freight accounted for significantly more carloads than outbound freight, with 35 percent of total carloads (451,000) terminating in Oregon compared to 23 percent (299,000 carloads) originating in the state. Intrastate traffic accounted for only 1 percent (11,000 carloads) of freight traffic by carloads, a testament to the long-distance nature of rail freight.

Figure 3-7. Oregon rail carloads by direction of flow, 2022



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

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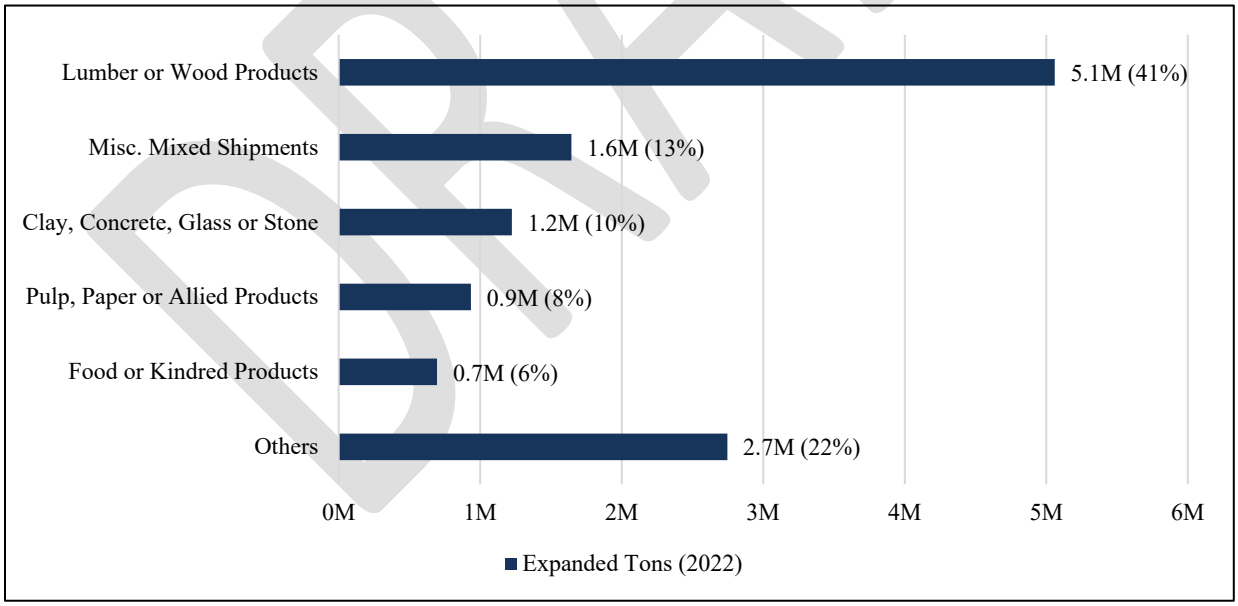
These trends indicate that Oregon, which was historically a major source of rail traffic tonnage from extractive resource industries such as lumber and wood products, has begun to transition more to an industrial and service economy focused on bringing freight into the state. Additionally, this also underscores an important role that Oregon plays in the national rail network as a route through which goods move through the network.

3.2.3.1 Key commodities originating in Oregon transported by rail

Lumber or wood products comprised the largest proportion (41 percent) of freight rail traffic originating in Oregon, totaling 5.1 million tons in 2022 (**Figure 3-8**). Around 60 percent of this freight traffic terminated in California, Illinois, and Texas, which is consistent with patterns reported in previous Oregon State Rail plans. Another 20 percent of this traffic terminated in Arizona, Colorado, and Utah. Miscellaneous mixed shipments, (intermodal) accounted for the next highest proportion (13 percent) of freight movement originating in Oregon, with 88 percent of shipments terminating in Illinois and Washington. Clay, concrete, glass, and stone freight accounted for 10 percent of total tonnage originating in Oregon, with cement originating in Portland and terminating in Washington, Idaho, and Nevada accounting for 70 percent of these movements. A sizeable portion of this cement (12 percent) stayed within the state of Oregon. Pulp and paper products, primarily fiber and paper, constituted 8 percent of freight traffic originating in the state, with the majority being shipped to California, Illinois, and Washington. Food shipments including frozen fruit, vegetables, and juice, accounted for 6 percent of freight originating in Oregon, with the majority being shipped to Illinois, Georgia, Texas, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and within Oregon.

Figure 3-8. Originating Oregon rail tons by product type, 2022



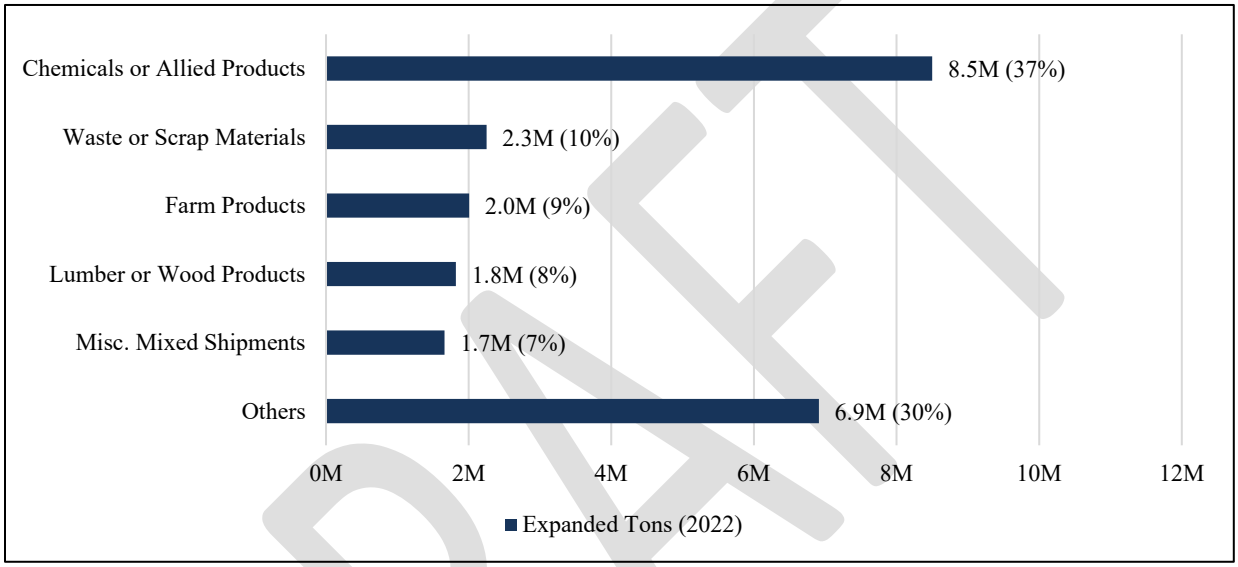
Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

3.2.3.2 Key commodities terminating in Oregon transported by rail

Chemical products were the largest tonnage moving to Oregon by rail, accounting for 37 percent (8.5 million tons) of total tonnage in 2022 (**Figure 3-9**). Most of these shipments (80 percent) were potassium products (potash) and miscellaneous industrial chemicals originating in

Saskatchewan, Wyoming, and British Columbia. Waste or scrap materials from Washington, California, and within Oregon were the next highest commodity (10 percent) terminating in Oregon. Farm products (grains, nuts, and seeds) from Montana, North Dakota, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Washington accounted for the third largest category (9 percent) of freight terminating in Oregon. Lumber stock and miscellaneous wood products accounted for 8 percent of freight terminating in the state, with the majority coming from British Columbia (60 percent), as well as Washington, California, and Alberta (22 percent), and intrastate (4 percent). Inbound freight of miscellaneous mixed shipments (intermodal) from Illinois, California, Washington, and Texas accounted for 7 percent of total rail tonnage terminating in Oregon.

Figure 3-9. Terminating Oregon rail tons by product type, 2022



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

3.2.3.3 Rail freight flows by county

Freight originating in Oregon

Multnomah County (which includes Portland and Port of Portland and major intermodal terminals) accounts for the highest volumes of freight originating in the state (**Figure 3-10**). Intermodal and lumber products are the two largest product types. Illinois, Washington, and California are the primary recipient of these two commodity groups. A wide range of additional commodities are shipped from Multnomah, including chemical products (to California, Washington, Illinois, and within Oregon), transportation equipment (to Illinois), Portland cement (to Idaho, Utah, and other states), metal products (to Texas and California), and scrap (within Oregon).

Lane County, in the Willamette Valley, is the second largest source of freight originating in the state. Nearly all the shipments originating from the county consist of lumber and wood products as well as paper products to California, Illinois, Washington, Arizona, Nevada, Texas, and Oklahoma.

Douglas County is the third largest source of rail flows in the state. Most freight traffic from the county is comprised of lumber stock, plywood, and other wood. The remainder of traffic is processed nonmetallic minerals shipped within Oregon and to California.

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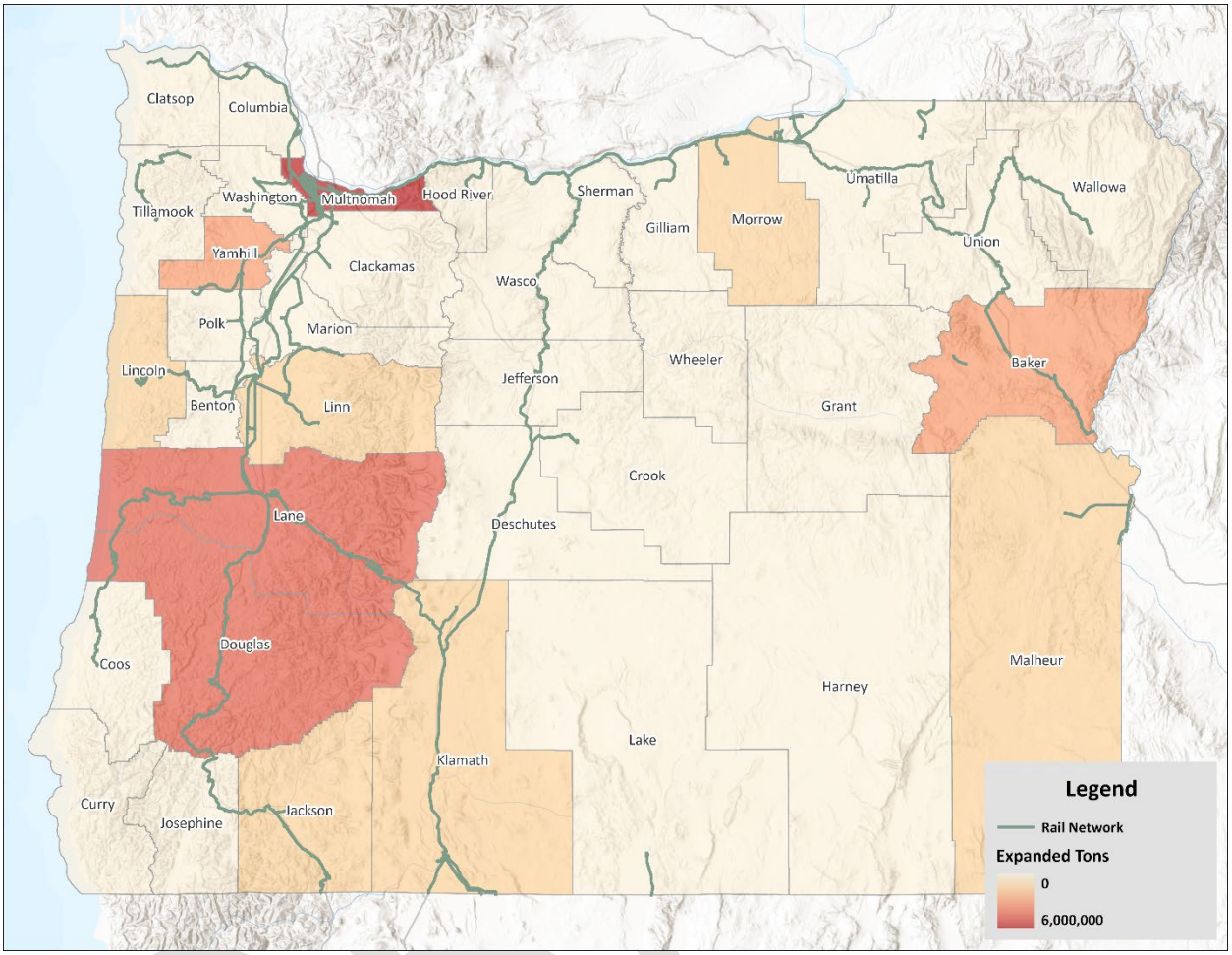
Figure 3-10. Originating freight flows by County, 2022



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

Baker County in eastern Oregon is the fourth largest source of rail flows in the state, with most originating flows comprised of Portland cement movements to Washington, Idaho, and Nevada. Intrastate movements of this cement account for the remaining tonnages.

Yamhill County is the fifth largest source of rail flows in the state, with most originating flows comprised of lumber and wood products and iron and steel products. Lumber stock is primarily moved to California, as well as Illinois, Missouri, Texas, Arizona, and Nevada. Iron and steel products are shipped to California, Utah, and British Columbia.

Freight terminating in Oregon

Multnomah County has the highest tonnage of terminating rail flows in the state, receiving a variety of goods from across the country (**Figure 3-11**). The largest category of shipments is chemical products. These are primarily potassium product shipments (e.g. potash) from Saskatchewan and Wyoming, with a smaller contribution from British Columbia. The next largest categories are intermodal shipments from Illinois and California; grain, nut, and seed shipments from Montana and North Dakota; lumber stock and miscellaneous wood products from British Columbia; food products such as nuts, malt liquors, flour, corn, and sugar from

British Columbia, Illinois, and Colorado; crude petroleum from North Dakota; and liquefied natural gas from British Columbia. Together, these categories account for 40 percent of freight terminating in the county.

Gilliam County is the second largest recipient of rail flows in the state by tonnage. Almost all the flows that are terminated in this county are waste and scrap moves from Washington and within Oregon going to the Columbia Ridge Landfill located near Arlington.

Lane County is the third largest recipient of rail flows into the state by tonnage. The largest category of shipments is chemical products. These are primarily miscellaneous industrial chemicals from South Dakota and British Columbia, as well as plastics from Louisiana and dyes from Illinois and Texas. The next largest categories are plywood from British Columbia; wood shipments from Saskatchewan, British Columbia, and Montana, and Portland; cement and processed nonmetallic minerals from Alberta, Washington, and British Columbia; grain shipments from British Columbia and Illinois; and flour from Washington and British Columbia. Together, these categories account for over 50 percent of freight terminating in the county.

Marion County is the fourth largest county by terminating tonnage, with the most significant product types being food, chemical, and farm products. Food products include corn from Nebraska; soybeans from Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota; and nuts and vegetable oils from Minnesota. Chemical products include potassium, sodium, and miscellaneous industrial chemicals from British Columbia, Utah, Texas, Alberta, and other states, while farm products are largely grain from Minnesota, South Dakota, and North Dakota.

Columbia County is the fifth largest county by terminating tonnage, with most inbound flows comprised of refined petroleum products from North Dakota and the remainder comprised of paper products from Illinois and Alberta.

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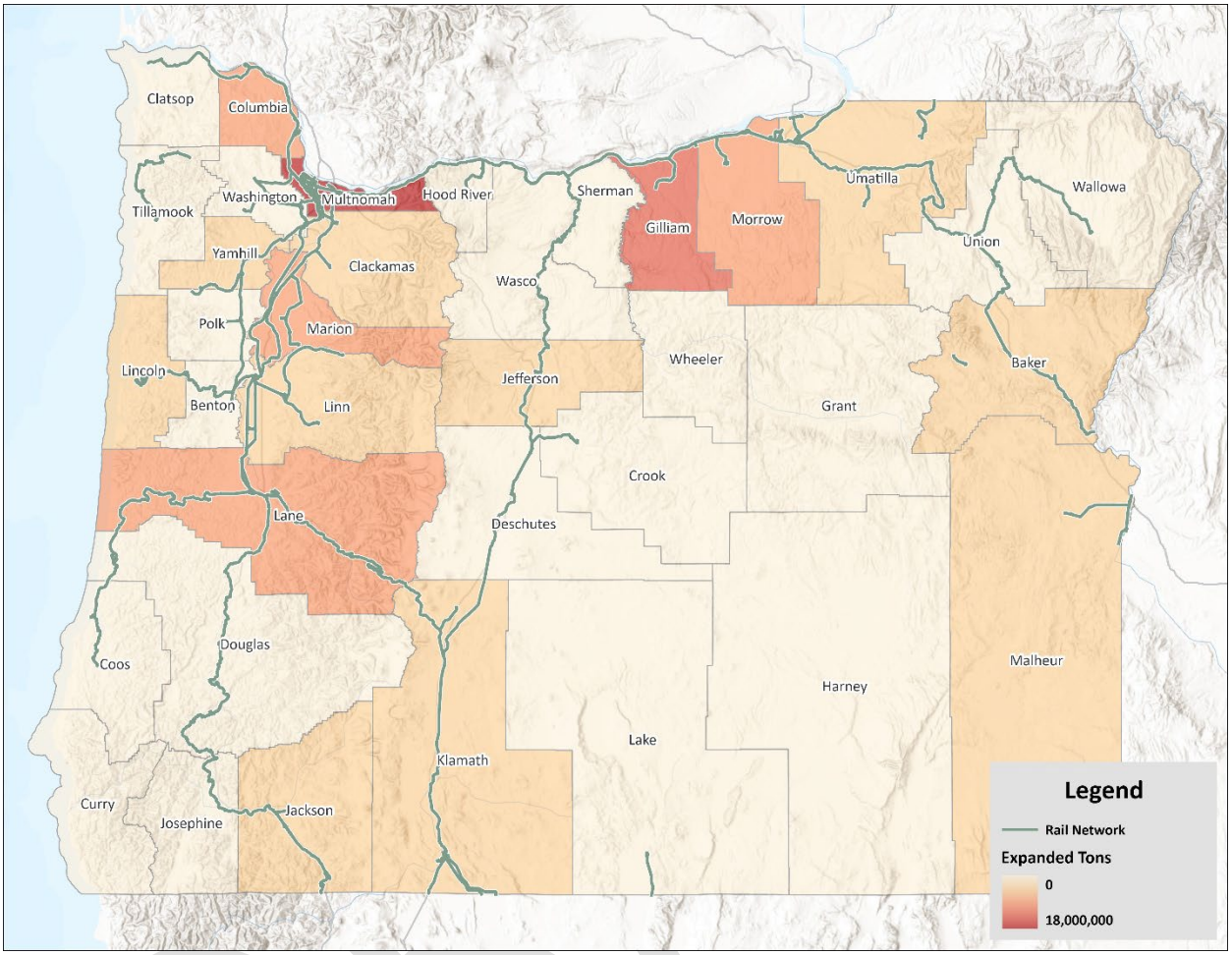
Figure 3-11. Terminating freight flows by county, 2022



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

3.2.3.4 Train movements by direction of flow

RailState

As further discussed in Appendix A, data collected from the rail network intelligence company RailState was used to analyze the existing conditions of Oregon's rail network. As shown in **Figure 3-12**, 16 sensors were deployed throughout Oregon's Class I rail network (including one just outside the state in Stronghold, California). These sensors gathered data about the movement of trains that passed them. A year's worth of this data encompassing the days from February 2025 through January 2026 was used to classify train movements according to the four directions of flow used in **Figure 3-6** and **Figure 3-7**, as well as for further analysis described in Appendix A.

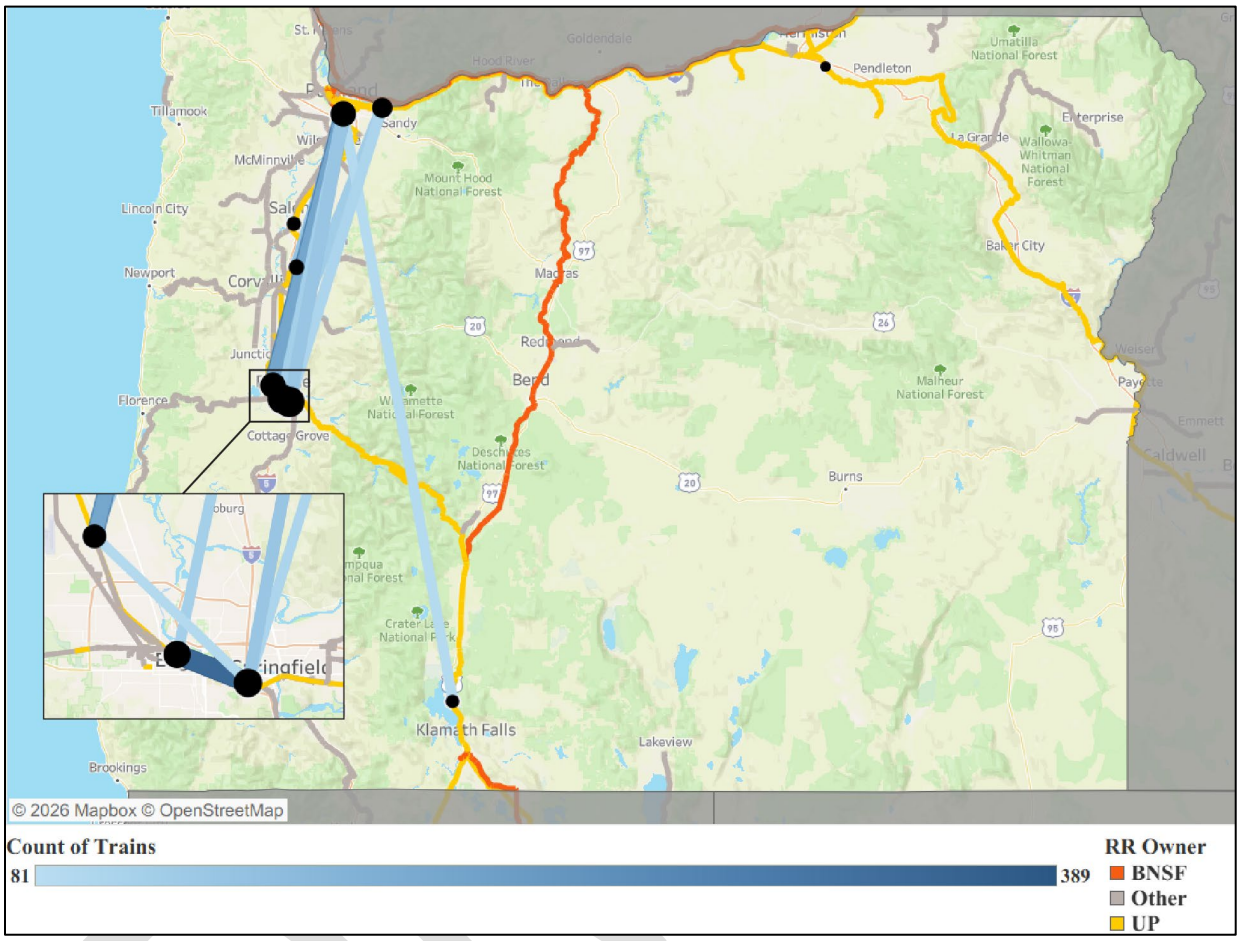
Figure 3-12. RailState Oregon deployment sensor sites

Source: RailState, 2026

Intrastate (within Oregon)

As seen in **Figure 3-13** a majority of intrastate train trips happen in the Willamette Valley between the Eugene and Portland terminal areas. These trips gather railcars at yards which are then added to trains bound for other states or provinces or are built into new trains. Other significant flows of intrastate rail traffic are from the Portland terminal area to Klamath Falls and from the Eugene terminal area to the Troutdale sensor just east of Portland. The Eugene to Troutdale trains likely continue east to Hinkle Yard west of Pendleton, as there are no major terminals between Troutdale and Hinkle Yard.

Figure 3-13. Origin-destination sensor pairs of intrastate revenue freight trains within Oregon, February 2025-January 2026[36]



Source: David Evans and Associates Analysis, RailState 2026

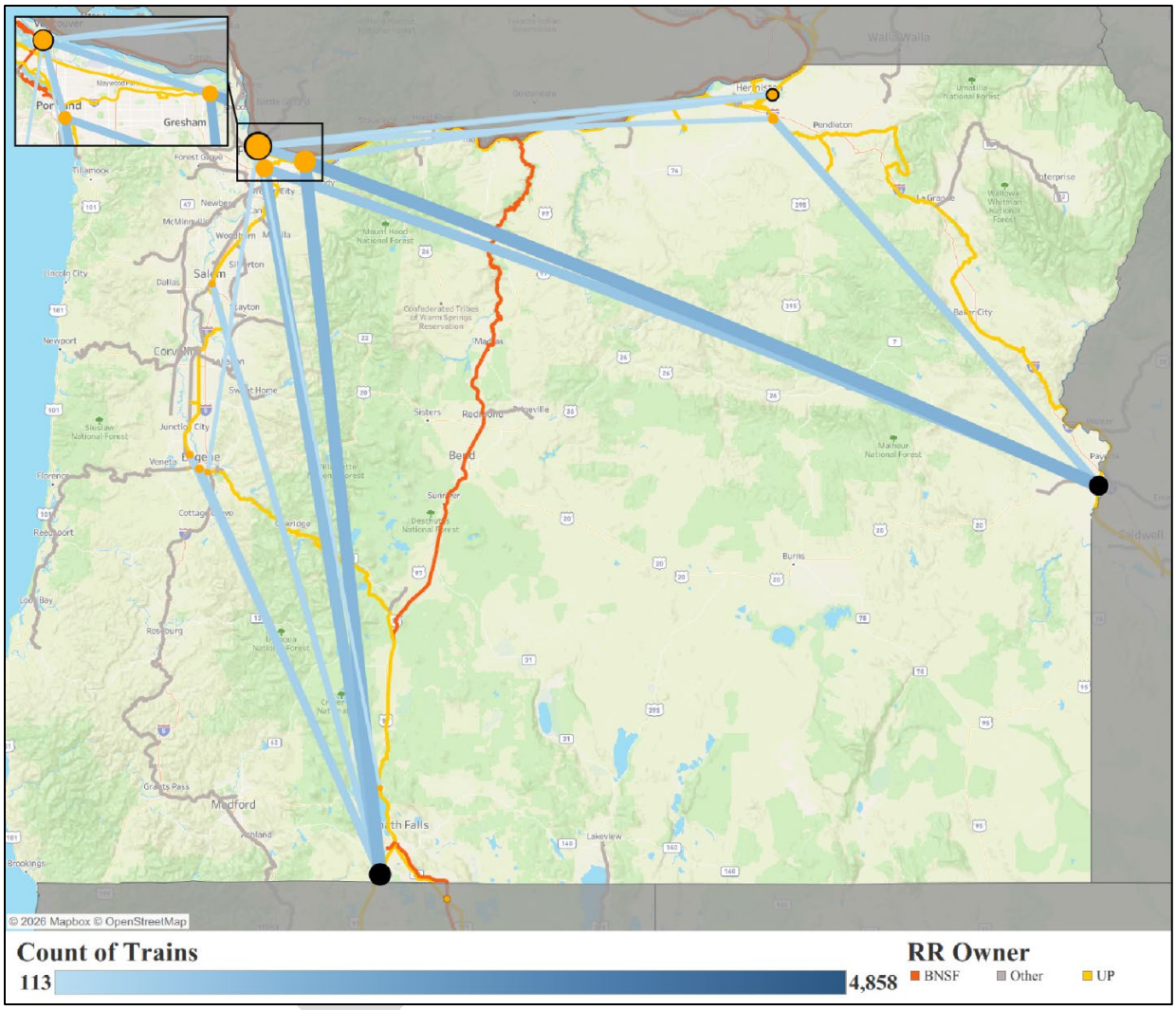
Interstate originating

Interstate train traffic from Oregon predominantly originates from the Portland terminal area, especially at North Portland as indicated in **Figure 3-14**. Significant amounts of traffic flow through North Portland into Washington State from the Portland area, as well as from Hinkle Yard (first seen at Troutdale). Other traffic flows out of the state via Worden, Ontario, and to a lesser extent Cold Springs, come from the Portland terminal area. The Eugene terminal area contributes consistent train counts to traffic flows out of the state via Worden, and Hinkle Yard contributes trains to interstate flows out of Cold Springs and Ontario. Interstate trains are not seen originating at the Ontario sensor site itself, indicating that trains are not originating at points along the main line between Hinkle Yard and the Oregon-Idaho state line. This means that the larger yards at LaGrande and Baker City are no longer chiefly used to originate or terminate trains as they were in the past and instead likely support local switching, maintenance of way, and in the case of La Grande, interchange with Class III short line railroads. The BNSF Railway

[36] Origin-destination pairs with less than 75 trains between February 2025 and January 2026 not included.

Oregon Trunk corridor through Bend sees very little in the way of interstate traffic, with the only traffic originating out of Oregon on the line being roughly one train per day out of Klamath Falls sighted at the sensor at Stronghold, California.

Figure 3-14. Origin (orange) and destination (black) sensor sighting points of interstate revenue freight trains originating from Oregon[37]



Source: David Evans and Associates Analysis, RailState 2026

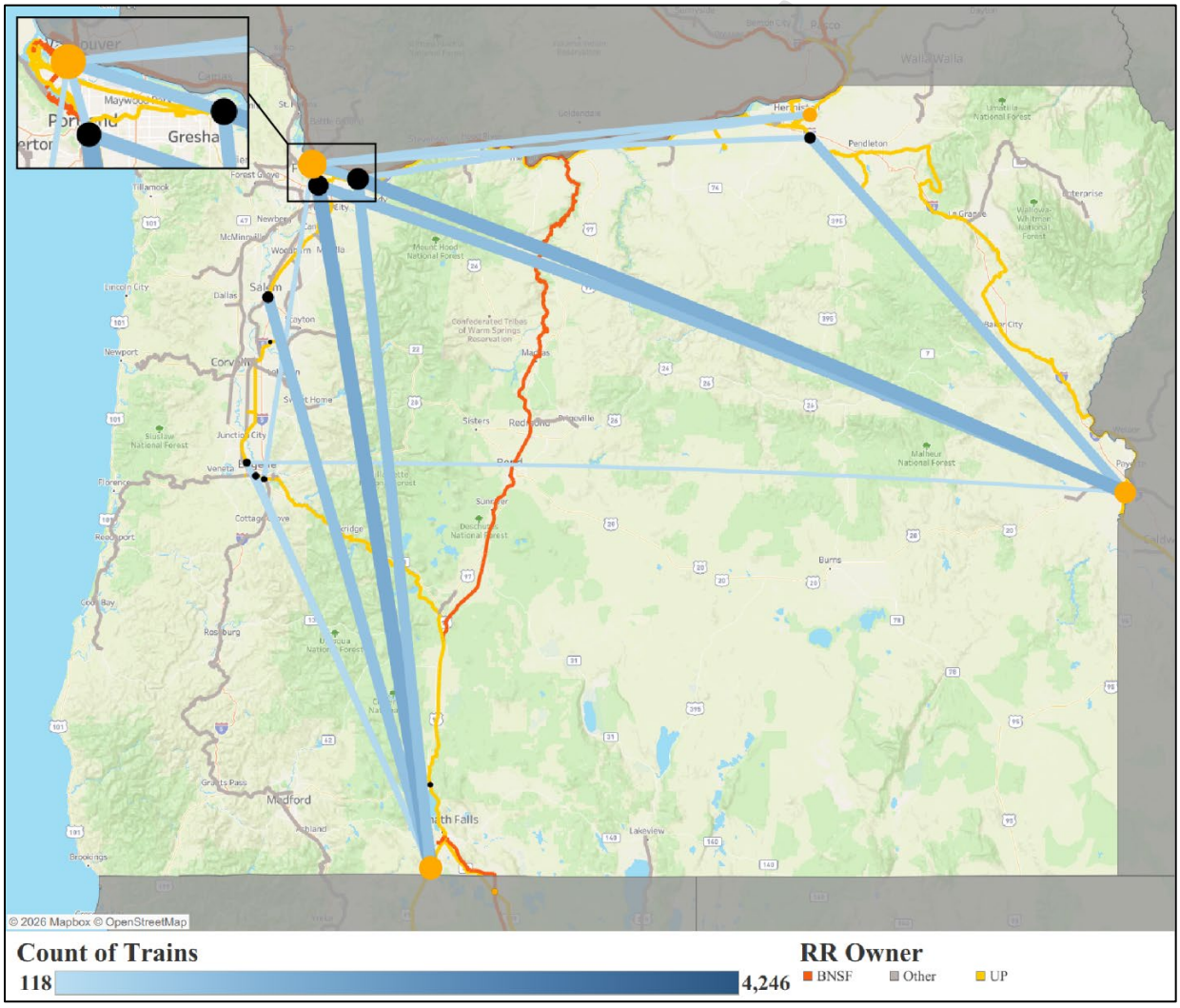
Interstate terminating

As seen in **Figure 3-15**, most trains terminating in Oregon after arriving from outside the state terminate in the Portland area. From Ontario in the east, manifest and grain trains tend to be sighted last at Troutdale on their way to the Port of Portland or Union Pacific's Albina or Barnes Yards, while intermodal trains are usually sighted last at Haig as they travel into Brooklyn Yard just south of that sensor. From Worden in the south, intermodal trains tend to be sighted last at

[37] Origin-destination pairs with less than 100 trains between February 2025 and January 2026 not included.

Salem, the last sensor before they arrive at Brooklyn Yard, and manifest trains tend to be seen last at Haig, the final sensor before Albina Yard and the Port of Portland complex. Other more minor traffic flows include manifest traffic from Worden to the Eugene terminal area and grain, potash, and manifest traffic entering at Cold Springs and being seen last at Troutdale just east of Portland.

Figure 3-15. Origin (orange) and destination (black) sensor sighting points of interstate revenue freight trains terminating in Oregon[38]



Source: David Evans and Associates analysis, RailState

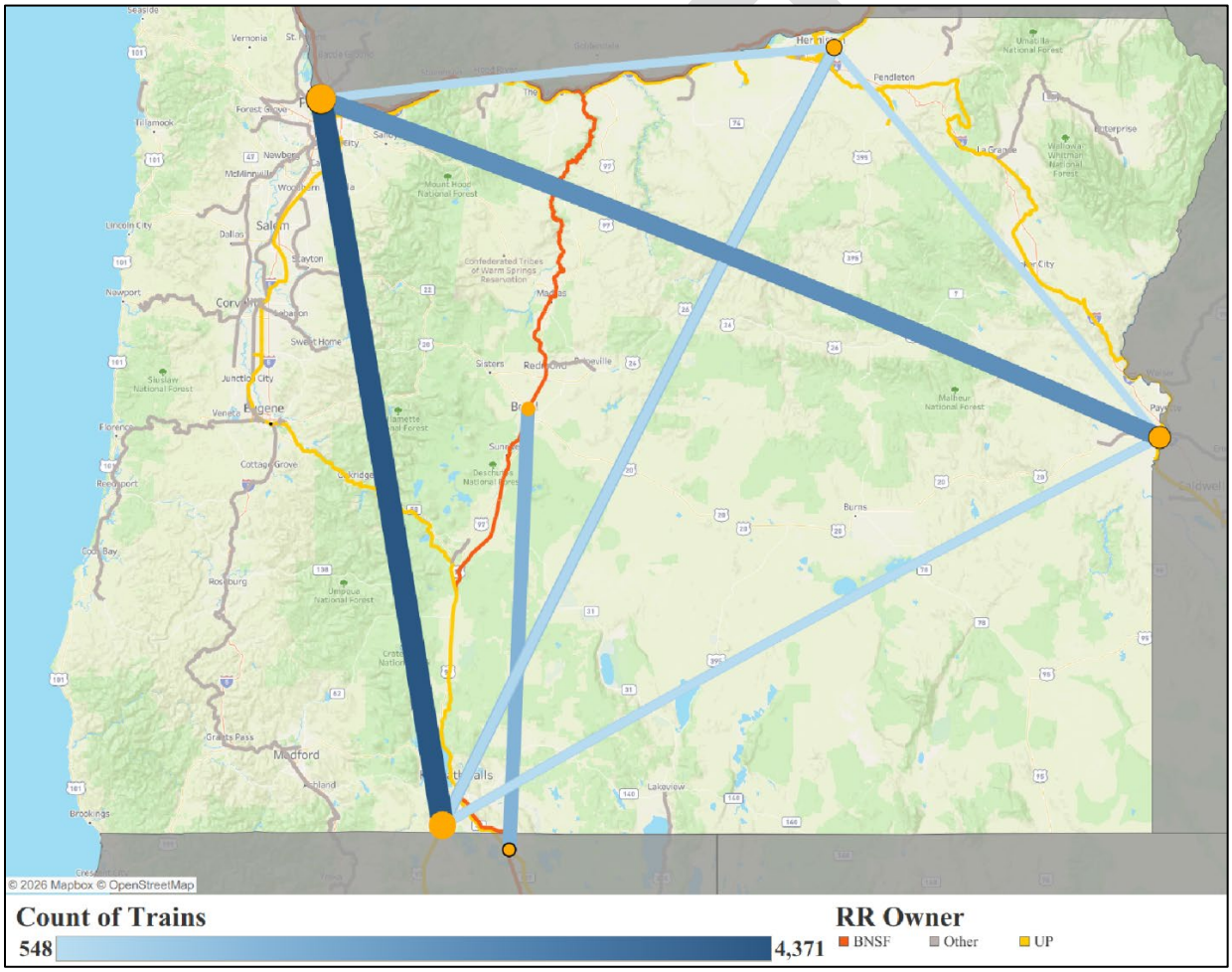
Passthrough

The most dominant type of train trip observed was passthrough trains, with over 4,000 trains alone observed northbound through the state via sensors at Worden and North Portland as seen in **Figure 3-16**. Of all the passthrough traffic flows, this was the heaviest, followed by North

[38] Origin-destination pairs with less than 100 trains between February 2025 and January 2026 not included.

Portland to Ontario. BNSF Railway's Inside Gateway corridor via Bend also contributes to this traffic type, with roughly 1,700 trains traversing the corridor southbound. Because the state's rail network is so heavily used by trains passing through, the network plays an important role in national freight logistics and commerce, particularly among freight movements on the West Coast and mountain west corridors. However, the network does not solely support national interests, as many of these passthrough trains (particularly manifest trains) pick up and set out blocks of cars along the way. As railroads have searched for greater operating efficiencies, this practice of "block swapping" has become more prevalent, leading to the traffic of some trains which previously would have terminated or originated in Oregon being amalgamated into other trains that pass through the state.

Figure 3-16. Origin/destination sensor sighting points of revenue freight trains passing through Oregon



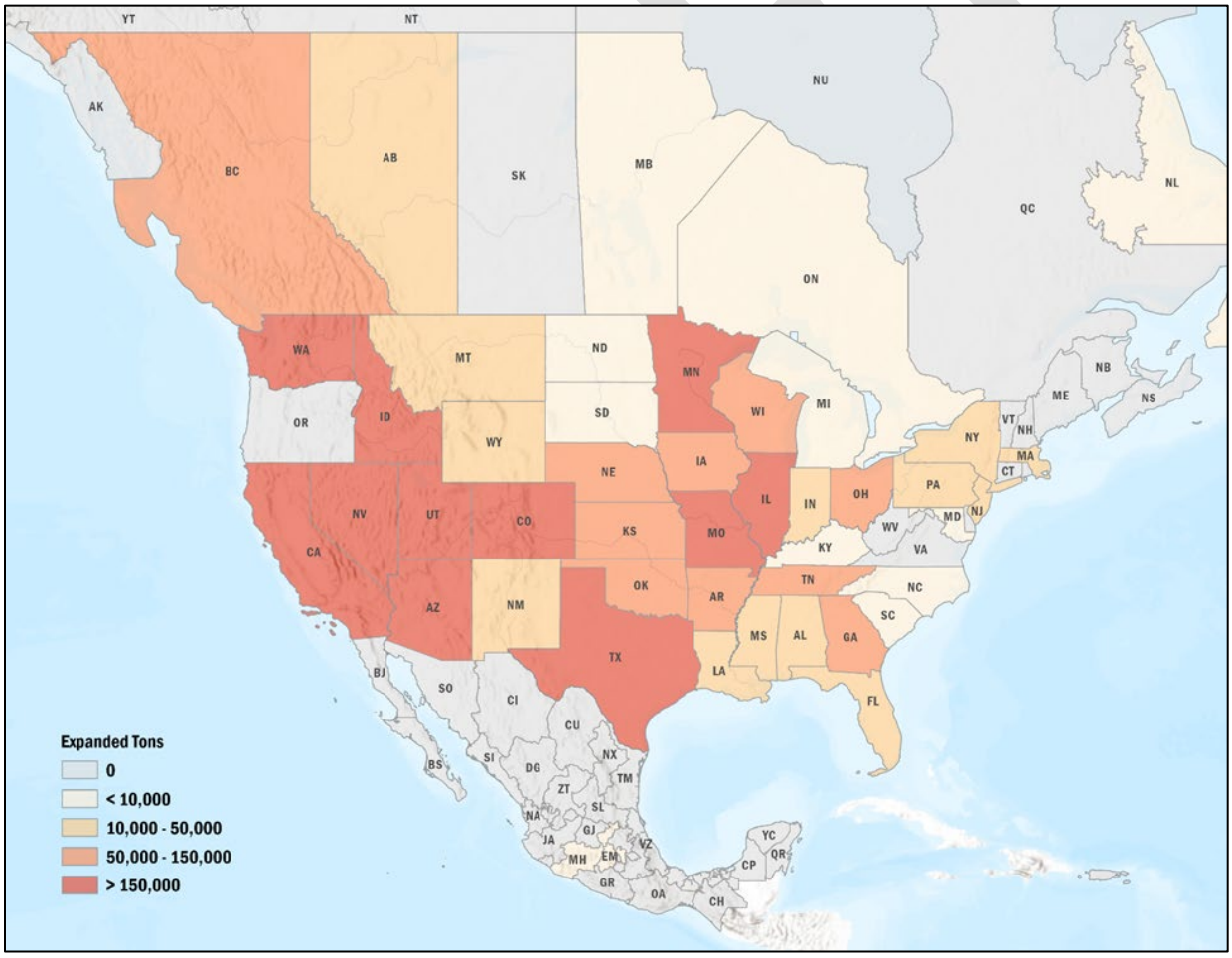
Source: David Evans and Associates analysis, RailState

3.2.3.5 Trade partners

Goods are shipped from Oregon by rail to a wide variety of states within the United States, as well as to Canada and Mexico (**Figure 3-17**). California, Illinois, Washington, Texas, and Idaho are the largest recipients of rail flows from Oregon, constituting about 70 percent of total tonnage.

- California receives lumber stock, plywood, treated wood, paper, iron, steel, potassium products, and sodium products.
- Illinois receives lumber stock, plywood, intermodal shipments, motor vehicles, paper and frozen fruits/vegetables.
- Washington receives intermodal shipments, Portland cement, industrial chemicals, wood products, and forest materials.
- Texas receives lumber stock, frozen fruits/vegetables, iron, and steel.
- Idaho receives Portland cement, lumber stock, and industrial chemicals.

Figure 3-17. Outbound trading partners by State and Province, 2022



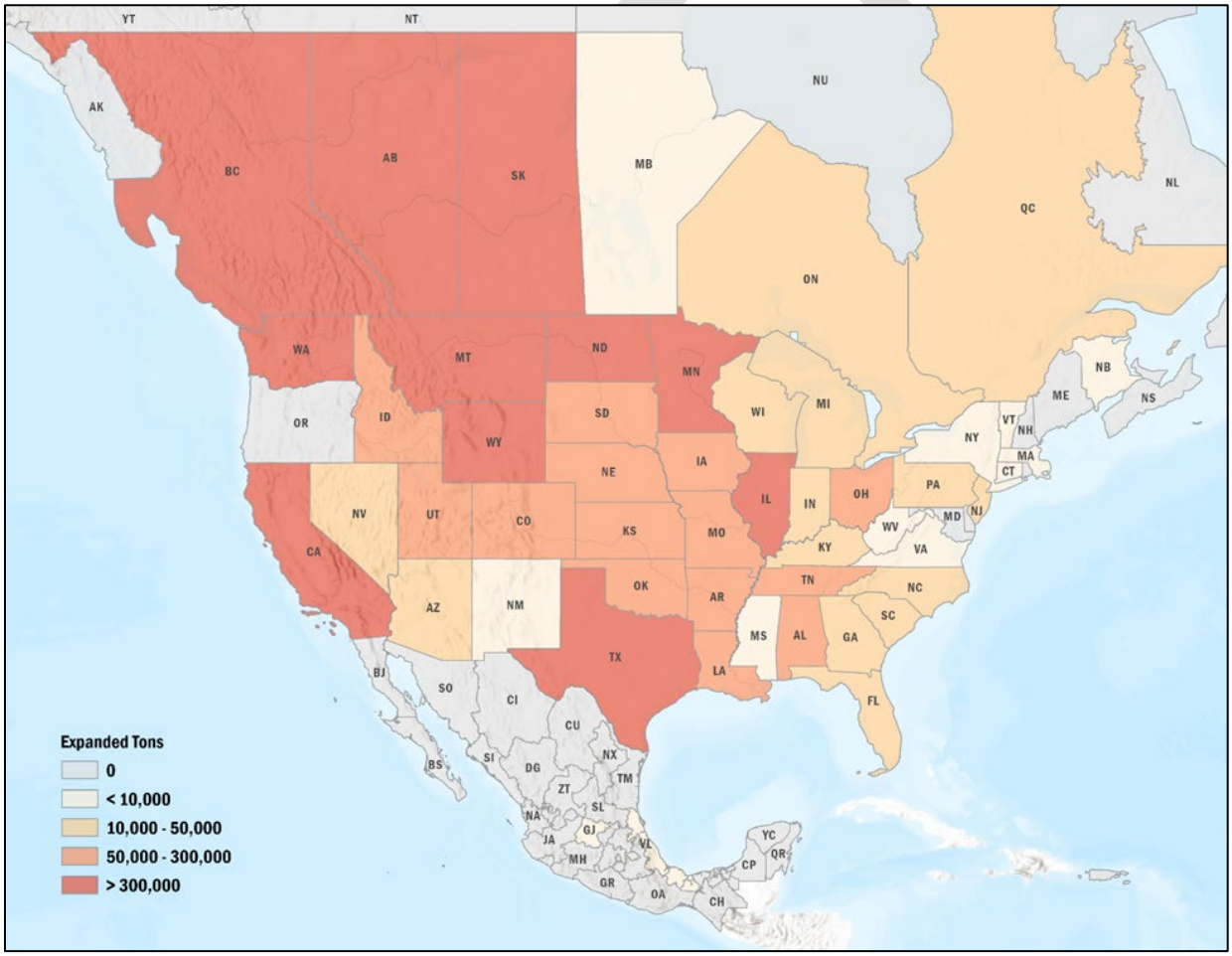
Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

Oregon receives inbound flows from a variety of U.S. states, Canadian provinces, and Mexican states (**Figure 3-18**). Saskatchewan, Wyoming, British Columbia, Washington, Illinois, North Dakota, and California all send significant freight to the state.

Oregon receives:

- potassium products from Saskatchewan and Wyoming;
- lumber stock, wood products, industrial chemical, liquefied natural gas, and nuts/vegetable oils from British Columbia;
- waste, scrap, and lumber products from Washington;
- petroleum products and grain from North Dakota; and
- intermodal shipments from Illinois and California.

Figure 3-18. Inbound trading partners by State and Province, 2022

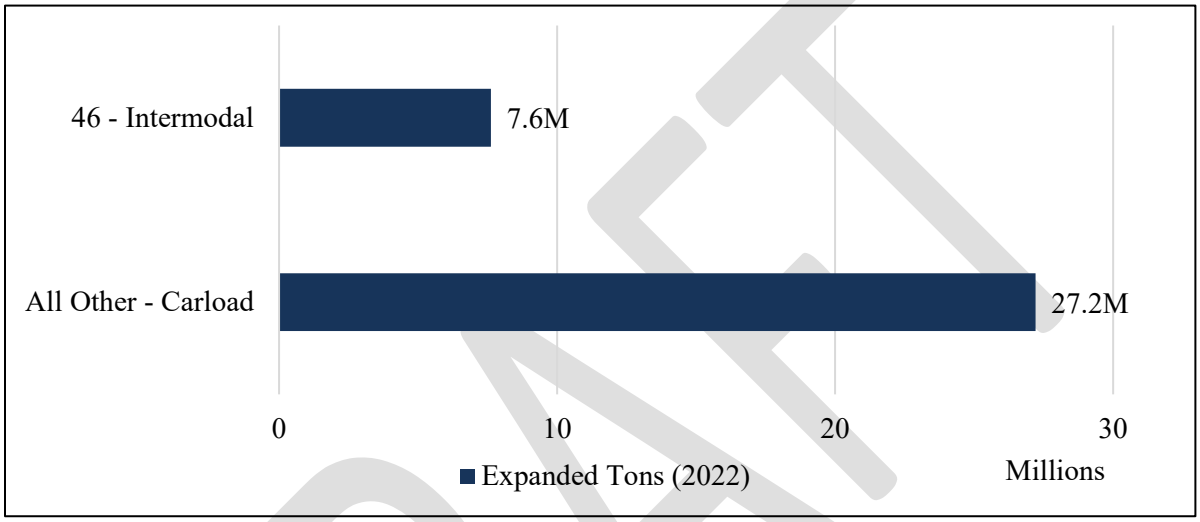


Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

3.2.3.6 Freight movement by car type

Statistics in the Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample include traditional railcars, but also intermodal containers and trailers. Intermodal containers and trailers comprise 22 percent (7.6 million tons) of rail freight movements to and from Oregon, while the remaining 78 percent (27.2 million tons) were moved by all other carload types (**Figure 3-19**).

Figure 3-19. Rail tons originating or terminating in Oregon by Surface Transportation Board car type, 2022



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

3.2.4 Forecasts of Oregon future rail flows

The Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample does not include any forecast of future rail flows in Oregon. To provide these forecasts, data from the Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 database[39] was used to estimate forecast rates of change that were then applied to Surface Transportation Board waybill data. This data is produced through a partnership between the Bureau of Transportation Statistics and Federal Highway Administration and integrates data from a variety of sources to capture freight movement by all modes of transportation.

Forecast data from the Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 was downloaded through the Freight Analysis Framework Data Tabulation Tool for rail and intermodal (multiple mode) modes for the top five commodity groups from the waybill sample. Using 2022 as the base year, percent forecast change was calculated for the periods between 2022-2035 and 2035-2045 and then applied to the waybill summary of originating/terminating traffic by commodity.

Although Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 projects positive growth for lumber and wood products over the forecast horizon, these projections do not reflect Oregon-specific supply constraints. Oregon Forest Resources Institute[40] anticipates long-term decline in statewide timber harvest between 2026 and 2065, driven by permanent losses in future forest growth caused by

[39] Freight Analysis Framework, Version 5: https://faf.ornl.gov/faf5/dtt_total.aspx

[40] Oregon Forest Resources Institute, Oregon Forest Facts 2025-26 Edition. OFRI-ForestFacts2025_DIGITAL.pdf

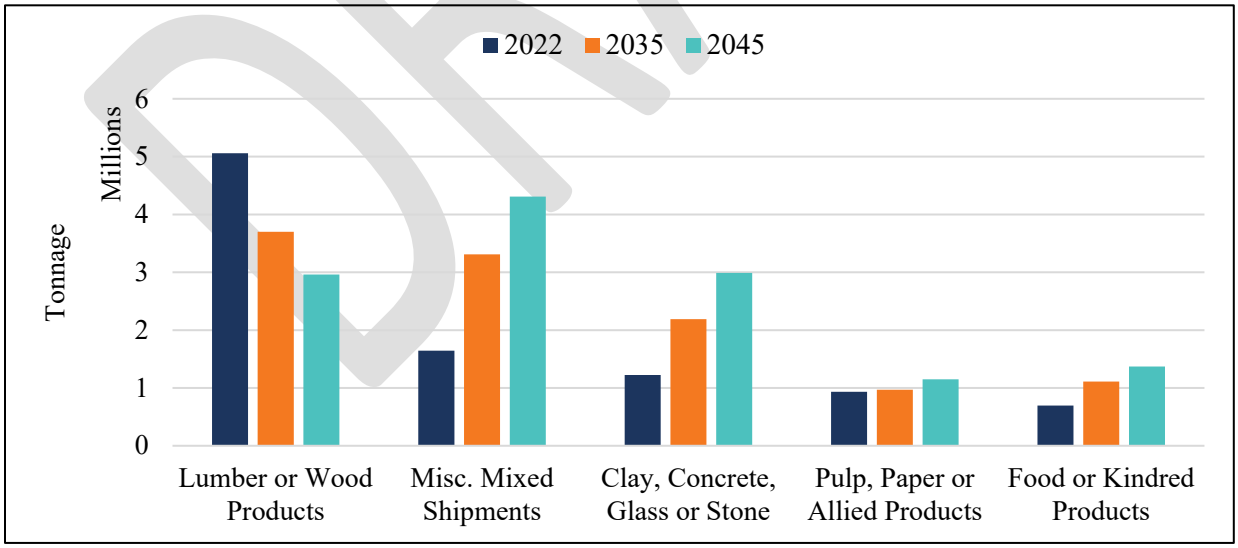
the 2020 Labor Day wildfires and reinforced by recent changes to Oregon's Forest Practices Act under the Oregon Private Forest Accord[41], which further restricts harvestable acreage and operating conditions.

Consistent with these expectations, analysis by Forisk Consulting indicates that Oregon's commercial timber inventory is projected to decline from approximately 60 billion board feet in 2017 to 50 billion board feet by 2035, implying an average long-term reduction of roughly 1 percent per year. To account for these structural constraints, the forecast for l umber and wood products was adjusted separately, incorporating an assumed decline of approximately 1 percent per year rather than applying Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 growth rates directly.

The largest proportion of growth for all commodity groups is expected to occur between 2022 and 2035 (**Figure 3-20**). Lumber and wood products are projected to experience a substantial decline in originating rail volumes, falling by approximately 27 percent by 2035. By 2045, lumber and wood products are forecast to decline by approximately 41 percent, decreasing from 5.0 million tons in 2022 to about 2.9 million tons, reflecting structural constraints on timber supply.

Miscellaneous mixed shipments and clay, concrete, glass, or stone are expected to account for a larger share of originating rail traffic by 2045. Over the forecast period, they are projected to grow by 144 and 162 percent respectively. Pulp, paper or allied products are not expected to grow as significantly, increasing by 23 percent over the same period. Food or kindred products are expected to surpass pulp, paper, or allied products, nearly doubling in traffic over the forecast period, from 700,000 to 1.4 million tons.

Figure 3-20. Originating traffic forecast (2022-2045)



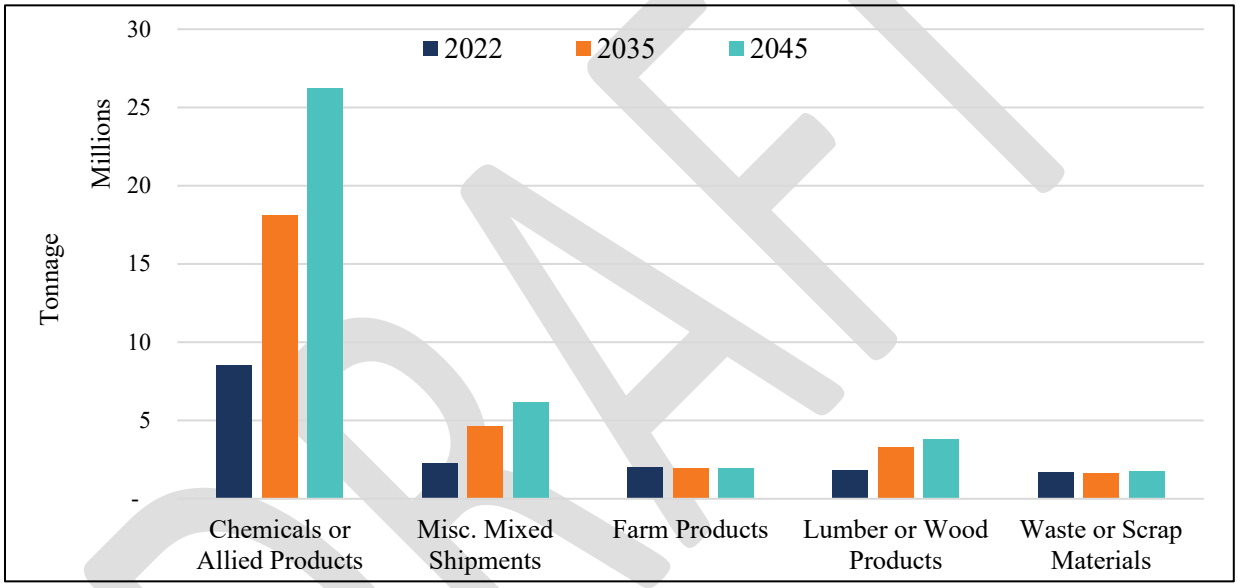
Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample, Freight Analysis Framework Version 5, Forisk Consulting, WSP analysis

[41] Forisk Consulting, Timber Inventory Forecasts for the Pacific Northwest, 2024. Timber inventory forecasts for the Pacific Northwest - Forisk

Chemical or allied products will continue to account for the largest proportion of terminating rail flows into Oregon, increasing by over 200 percent between 2022 and 2045, from 8.5 million to 26.2 million tons (**Figure 3-21**). A significant proportion of this growth is expected to occur between 2022 and 2035. Miscellaneous mixed shipments are also projected to grow significantly, with most of the growth expected between 2022 and 2035. Over the entire forecast period, this commodity group is projected to increase by 173 percent, from 2.3 million to 6.1 million tons.

Farm products and waste or scrap materials are expected to shrink between 2022 and 2035 by 2 and 4 percent respectively. Between 2035 and 2045, farm products are not expected to change while waste or scrap materials are expected to increase by 10 percent. Lumber or wood products are projected to account for a larger share of terminating traffic, increasing by 82 percent between 2022-2035, and a further 16 percent between 2035-2045. Over the entire forecast period, this commodity group is expected to increase from 1.8 million to 3.8 million tons.

Figure 3-21. Terminating traffic forecast (tons): 2022, 2035 and 2045



Source: Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample, Freight Analysis Framework Version 5, WSP Analysis

3.2.4.1 Statewide freight flows by mode

As is typical in most states, trucks are the dominant mode of freight transportation in Oregon, handling 89 percent of originating traffic and 84 percent of terminating traffic in 2022 (**Table 3-1** and **Table 3-2**). For originating freight traffic, rail, water, and multiple modes and mail evenly account for the remaining traffic at around 3 to 4 percent each. Rail freight is comprised of carload and unit train traffic, while multiple modes and mail include containerized traffic handled by water, highway and/or rail. For terminating traffic, rail accounts for the second highest mode share (8 percent), while multiple modes and mail (5 percent) and water (3 percent) have the third and fourth highest mode share respectively. Shipments by air account for a small fraction (less than 0.1 percent) of originating and terminating traffic.

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Table 3-1. Originating freight traffic flows (tons) by mode: 2022 and 2045

Mode	Tonnage in Thousands (2022)	Tonnage in Thousands (2045)	Percent Change	Mode Share (2022)	Mode Share (2045)
Truck	189,952	280,940	48%	89%	88%
Rail	**9,345**	**16,480**	**76%**	**4%**	**5%**
Water	6,224	9,520	53%	3%	3%
Air (including Truck-air)	60	101	67%	<0.1%	<0.1%
Multiple Modes & Mail	6,782	11,001	62%	3%	3%
Total	**212,364**	**318,041**	**50%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 data tabulation tool & Surface Transportation Board Waybill Sample

Table 3-2. Terminating freight traffic flows (tons) by mode: 2022 and 2045

Mode	Tonnage in Thousands (2022)	Tonnage in Thousands (2045)	Percent Change (2022-2045)	Mode Share (2022)	Mode Share (2045)
Truck	182,741	273,378	50%	84%	83%
Rail	**18,322**	**31,819**	**74%**	**8%**	**10%**
Water	5,748	6,971	21%	3%	2%
Air (including Truck-air)	36	52	44%	<0.1%	<0.1%
Multiple Modes & Mail	11,102	16,490	49%	5%	5%
Total	**217,949**	**328,710**	**51%**	**100%**	**100%**

Source: Freight Analysis Framework Version 5 data tabulation tool & Surface Transportation Board waybill sample

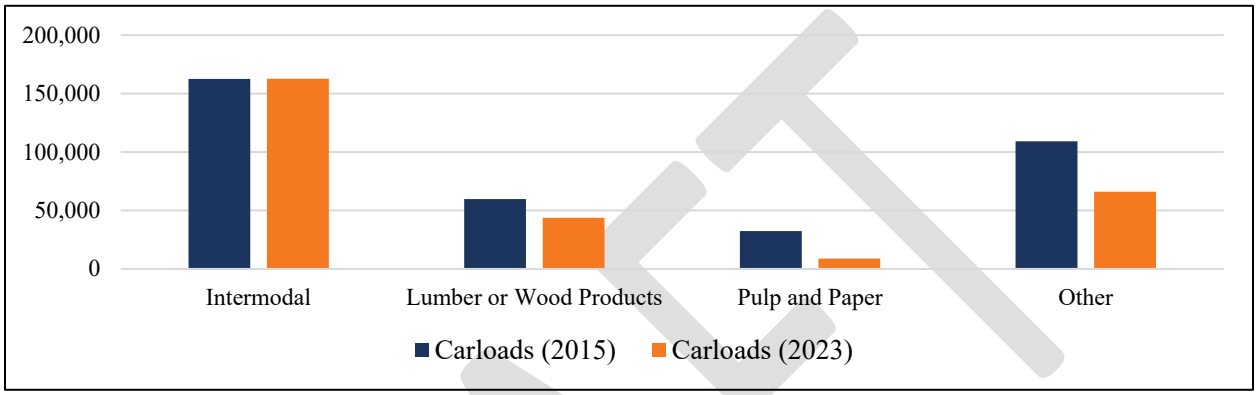
3.2.4.2 Trend analysis

In 2015 and 2023, the Association of American Railroads prepared a profile of Oregon's originating and terminating carloads (includes intermodal units). For originating traffic between 2015 and 2023, Intermodal carloads remained almost constant, shifting from 162,500 carloads to 162,700 carloads (**Figure 3-22**). Pulp and paper and lumber or wood products carloads decreased

over this period by 27 percent and 73 percent respectively. Carloads of other commodities declined by 40 percent.

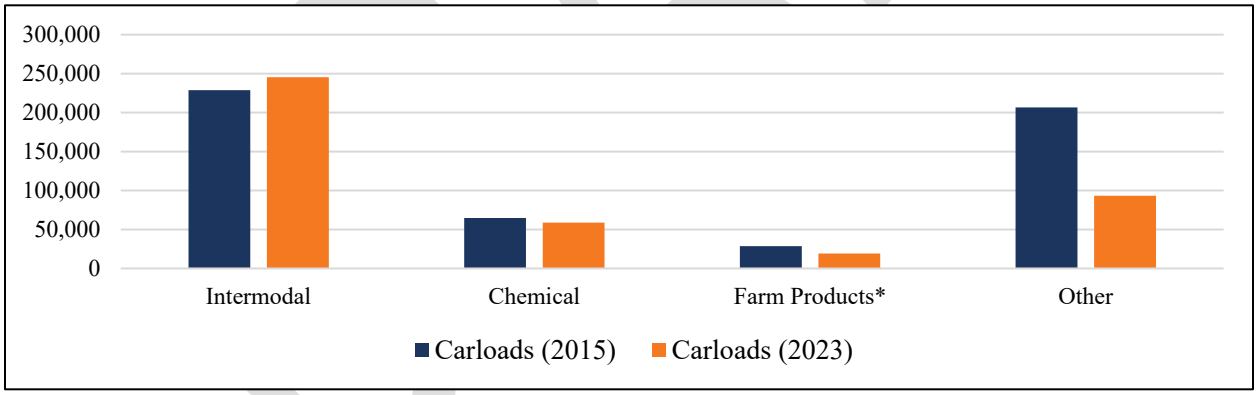
For terminating traffic between 2015 and 2023, intermodal carloads increased 7 percent from 228,800 to 245,300 carloads (**Figure 3-23**). Farm products and chemical carloads decreased over this period by 33 percent and 9 percent respectively. Other carloads declined by 55 percent.

Figure 3-22. Originating carload traffic: 2015 and 2023



Source: Association of American Railroads Oregon State Fact Sheet 2015, 2023

Figure 3-23. Terminating carload traffic: 2015 and 2023



Source: Association of American Railroads Oregon State Fact Sheet 2015, 2023, Surface Transportation Board Carload waybill sample[42]

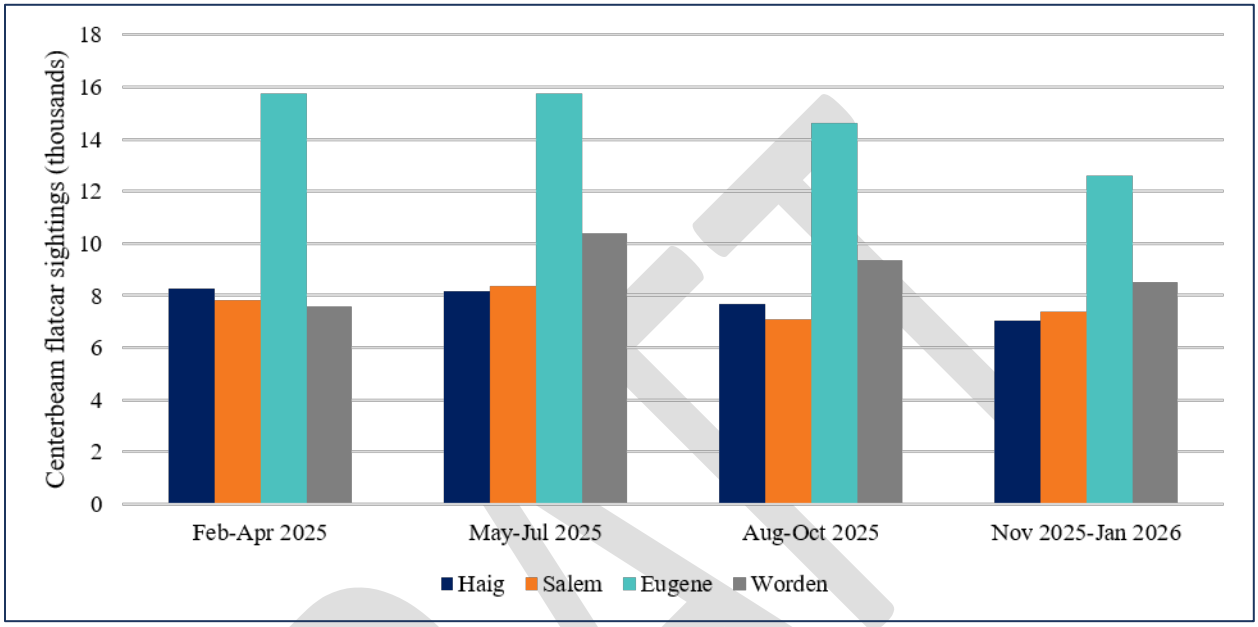
3.2.4.3 RailState validation

Use of RailState data allows for the creation of baseline levels of car sightings which can be used to observe trends in the movement of certain commodity types by rail which are strongly associated with a specific type of railcar. Given the strong expected trends in originating lumber or wood products (see **Figure 3-20**) and terminating chemical products (see **Figure 3-21**), centerbeam flatcars (which are used to ship dimensional lumber products) and tank cars (which

[42] Because AAR's 2023 Fact Sheet reported only Grain shipments, 2022 Waybill Sample was used to approximate 2023 Farm Products, including Grain

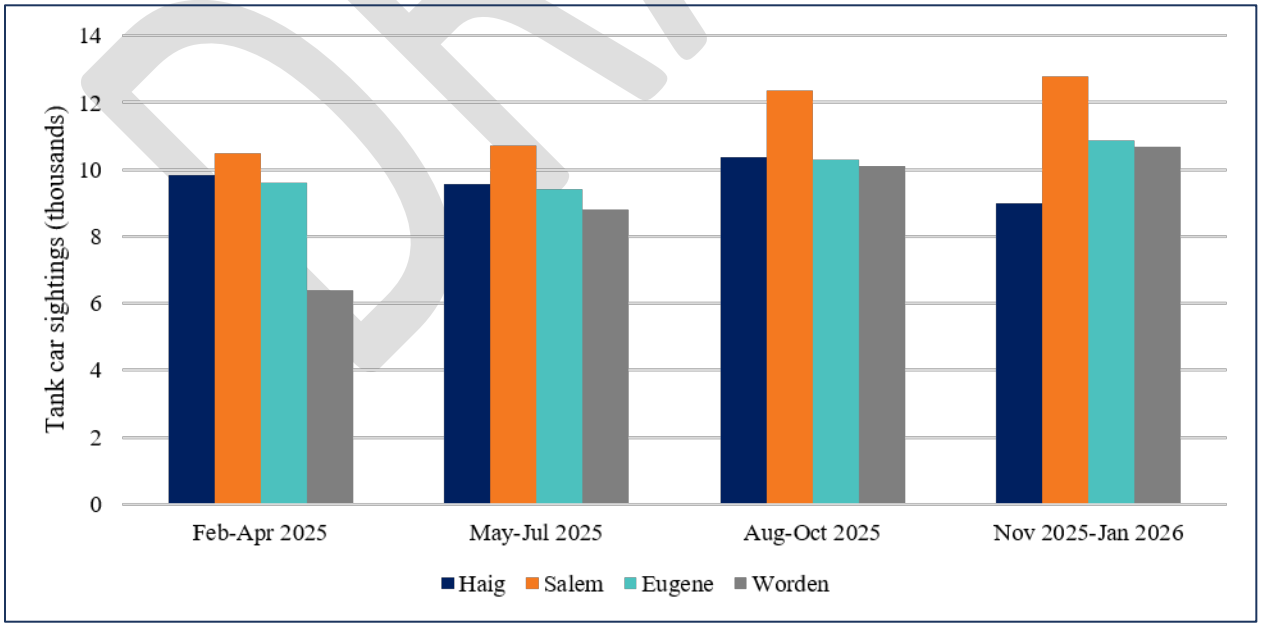
are used to ship liquid products) were utilized to create real-time indices to validate these projected trends. Sighting indices shown in **Figure 3-24** and **Figure 3-25** show counts of sightings of these car types from February 2025 through January 2026, confirming a general projected downward trend in centerbeam flatcar lumber traffic and showing a flat or increasing trend in tank car traffic.

Figure 3-24. Quarterly centerbeam flatcar sightings index



Source: 2026 RailState

Figure 3-25. Quarterly tank car sightings index



Source: 2026 RailState

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3.2.4.4 Discussion

The current data suggests that freight rail in Oregon is best characterized as stable or somewhat declining with targeted areas of growth rather than uniformly expanding or declining. While overall freight demand is expected to increase, rail's role within that system is evolving unevenly across commodities and markets.

Historical data indicates that total rail volumes remain substantial, with 62.3 million tons moved in 2022, the majority of which is passthrough and inbound traffic. This highlights Oregon's continued importance as a regional freight corridor, even where the state is not the origin or destination. However, comparisons between 2015 and 2022-23 show mixed trends. Intermodal traffic remained relatively static, while traditional bulk commodities such as chemicals and waste and scrap increased. This suggests a shift away from certain higher-growth logistics segments toward more traditional rail markets.

Commodity-level analysis reinforces that outlook. Oregon's rail system remains heavily dependent on a small number of core commodities, particularly lumber and wood products and chemicals. While these sectors continue to generate significant volumes, long-term forecasts suggest divergence. Lumber and wood products, historically the backbone of Oregon rail traffic, are projected to decline significantly due to structural constraints in timber supply, while other commodities such as chemicals, mixed shipments, and construction materials are expected to grow substantially, indicating that future rail growth will depend on diversification beyond traditional forest product markets.

Mode share trends further support the conclusion that rail is not losing relevance but is also not dramatically increasing its share of the freight market. Trucks currently dominate freight movement in Oregon, accounting for the vast majority of both originating and terminating traffic, while rail represents a relatively small share. By 2045, rail tonnage is forecast to grow significantly, yet its overall mode share is expected to increase only marginally. This indicates that rail is growing in absolute terms but largely maintaining its relative position within the broader freight system.

Taken together, these trends suggest that Oregon's freight rail system is not in decline, but rather transitioning. Growth is expected in specific commodity groups and corridors, particularly inbound chemical flows and multimodal shipments, while legacy sectors such as timber may continue to contract. The system's future performance will likely depend on its ability to adapt to these shifts by capturing emerging markets, maintaining competitiveness with trucking, and supporting industries with long-term growth potential.

3.2.4.5 Comparative Analysis

Freight mode share has public cost implications, and the State of Oregon has a role to play in supporting freight rail's ability to accommodate projected commodity growth while limiting the high public costs associated with truck travel. Freight trucks travel approximately 3.45 billion miles[43] on Oregon roads each year. Considering the reported vehicle weights and distance traveled together (measured as ton-miles), this represents an estimated 103 billion ton-miles of

[43] Calculated from: Oregon Department of Administrative Services, Office of Economic Analysis, *2025-2027 Oregon Highway Cost Allocation Study*, 2025, *https://www.oregon.gove/das/oea/Documents/ECONW-HCAS-Cost-Allocation-Study-2025027-Corrected.pdf*

freight movement annually.[44] At present, rail is estimated to haul 4.6 billion ton-miles of freight movement annually.

Oregon's Highway Cost Allocation Study projects that Oregon's state highways will carry about 78.2 percent of the state's heavy-vehicle travel in 2026. Heavy-vehicle travel is particularly concentrated on rural interstate highways even though rural interstates account for only about 11 percent of all vehicle travel in Oregon. The study also projects that travel by vehicles weighing 26,001 to 78,000 pounds will grow by an average of 4.9 percent each year. This matters to taxpayers because the state of Oregon is projected to provide $1.1 billion, or slightly over half (57.9 percent), of the total annual highway expenditures identified in the highway cost study, illustrating that highway expenditures, including pavement damage, are funded largely by the state. Rail capacity therefore has value to Oregon not only as part of the freight network, but also as a way to accommodate freight growth without placing the burden of demand and associated costs of that growth on publicly funded highways.

The difference in public impacts between the two modes is substantial. For every $1 in estimated public costs associated with highway accidents, pollution, highway pavement damage and emissions accommodating freight, moving the same tonnage by rail would generate only 9 cents in estimated public costs, according to research conducted by the Government Accountability Office[45] and the Congressional Budget Office.[46] Moving 103 billion ton-miles by truck results in an estimated $4.6 billion in annual public costs related to greenhouse gas emissions, pavement damage, roadway congestion, and safety consequences associated with crashes.

If 10 percent of existing truck freight miles, or an additional 10.3 billion ton-miles, were transported by rail instead, Oregon could save approximately $417.4 million annually in public costs, as shown in **Table 3-3** and **Figure 3-26**. These results demonstrate that shifting more freight from highways to railways can accommodate large volumes of freight movement while limiting the high level of pavement, congestion, safety, and environmental costs associated with truck travel. Public safety and highway pavement damage account for most of the estimated public costs of truck transportation at approximately 70 percent combined.

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[44] Total truck ton-miles were calculated from the *Oregon Cost Allocation Study* by taking the median of each weight class and extrapolating an average ton mileage per the reported miles by weight class.

[45] *Surface Freight Transportation: A Comparison of the Costs of Road, Rail and Waterways Freight Shipments That Are Not Passed On to Consumers.* Washington, D.C.: Government Accountability Office, 2011.

[46] *Pricing Freight Transport to Account for External Costs.* Washington, D.C.: Congressional Budget Office, 2014.

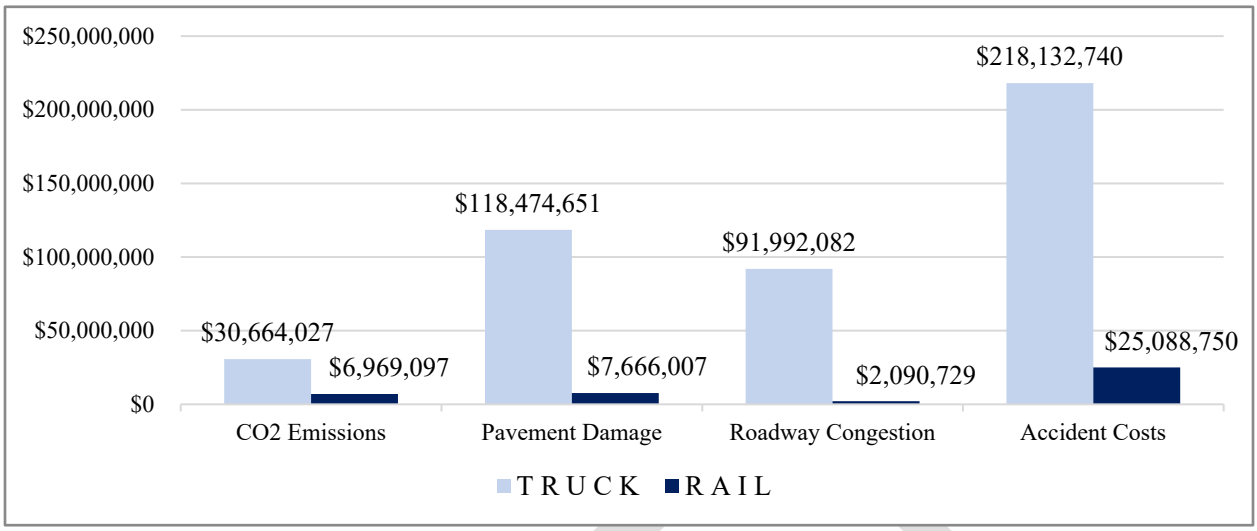
Table 3-3. Annual comparative public costs of 10 percent of Oregon truck ton-miles

Truck			
Calculation	**Calculation with Assumptions**[47]	**Result**	
(annual ton-miles)*(dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.003)	$30,664,027	CO2 emissions cost annually
(annual ton-miles)*(dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.0011)	$118,474,651	Pavement damage cost annually
(annual ton-miles) * (dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.009)	$91,992,082	Congestion cost annually
(annual ton-miles) * (dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.022)	$218,132,740	Public safety cost annually
10% Total Annual Truck Ton-Mile Public Costs		**$459,263,499**	**Public truck cost annually**
Rail			
Calculation	**Calculation with Assumptions**	**Result**	
(annual ton-miles)*(dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.0007)	$6,969,097	CO2 emissions cost annually
(annual ton-miles)*(dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.0007)	$7,666,007	Pavement damage cost annually
(annual ton-miles)*(dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.0002)	$2,090,729	Congestion cost annually
(annual ton-miles)*(dollar per ton-mile)	(10,302,586,325)*($.0024)	$25,088,750	Public safety cost annually
10% Total Annual Truck Ton-Miles shift to Rail Public Costs		**$41,814,583**	**Public rail cost annually**

Note: Dollar-per-ton-mile rates shown in the table are rounded for presentation. Calculations use the full, unrounded rates. See Appendix F for full details.

[47] Tabulated truck ton-miles multiplied by Government Accountability Office ton-mile figures as inflated to 2026 using the same chained-index methodology as employed by the Congressional Budget Office.

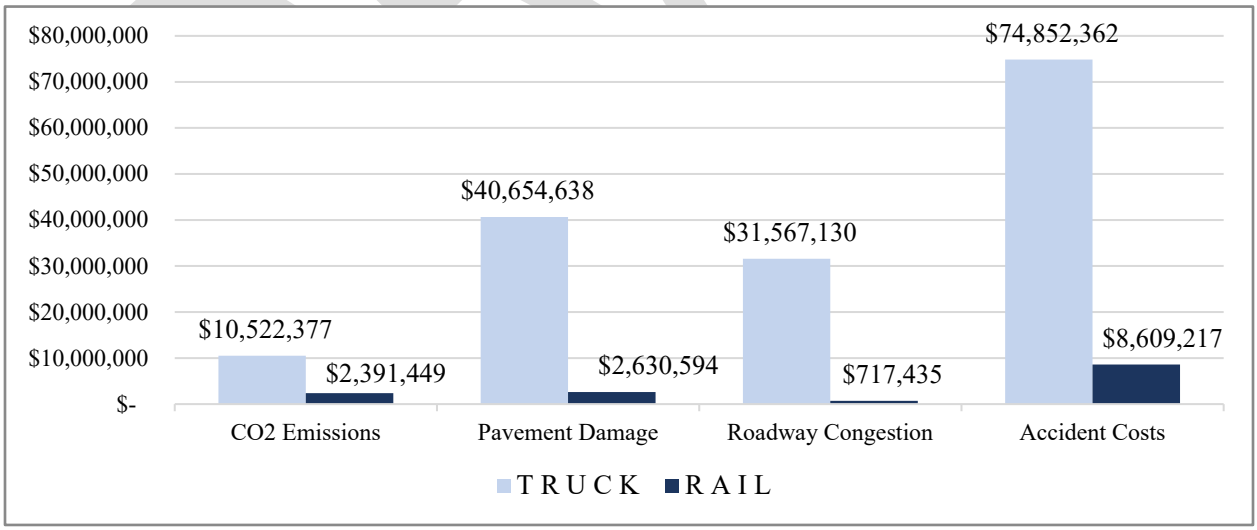
Figure 3-26. Annual public costs of shifting 10 percent of Oregon truck-ton-miles to rail



Implications of freight growth

Oregon benefits from lower public costs with every additional ton of freight hauled via its rail network as opposed to its highway network. As Oregon's freight needs grow, relying on highways to accommodate additional freight would increase truck travel and the significant public costs that come with it. Oregon's rail freight volumes are projected to grow from approximately 4.6 billion ton-miles today to 8.2 billion ton-miles by 2045, an increase of about 3.5 billion annual ton-miles. If Oregon's highway system has to accommodate those additional 3.5 billion ton-miles entirely by truck, the added freight movement would generate an estimated $158 million annually in added public costs from pavement damage, roadway congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, and safety impacts as shown in **Figure 3-27.**

Figure 3-27. Annual Public Costs if Projected Rail Growth is Carried via Truck



It is in Oregon's best interests that rail capture a greater share of projected freight growth and increase its share of the state's overall freight movement because rail can accommodate freight movements at a substantially lower public cost. Trucks and railroads will continue to serve different and complementary roles in Oregon's freight system. However, continued investment in rail infrastructure and capacity can help Oregon meet growing freight demand without placing too much of that burden of that growth on the highway system, which has much higher costs to the public than rail. At a minimum, these calculated benefits well exceed the currently projected state spending on rail infrastructure and show that higher levels of state investment could be warranted to achieve the identified infrastructure improvements in Appendix C.

3.2.5 Freight rail equipment trends

The availability of rail equipment is one of the essential determinants to whether freight tonnage can move by rail. Simply stated, even if price, transit time, service reliability, and other terms and conditions are acceptable for a shipper to choose rail, transportation cannot be provided without available equipment. Therefore, trends affecting the overall size, composition, age, ownership, and availability of different types of railway equipment in the U.S. rail network are germane to policymakers and other transportation planning stakeholders.

U.S. rail equipment is tracked by RailInc, a wholly owned, for profit subsidiary of the Association of American Railroads. RailInc serves as the rail industry's central repository for interline rail data, including the Universal Machine Language Equipment Register, which tracks over 2 million unique pieces of rail, steamship, and highway equipment.

As of the end of 2024, the Register reports 1.64 million pieces of rail equipment were revenue-generating railcars—equipment used by paying shippers to move freight. As shown in **Figure** 3-28**,** the revenue-generating fleet fluctuates year over year as new cars are added, and older cars are retired and scrapped. Since 2014, the overall fleet size has increased by 5.5 percent, or 86,000 units. Fleet size fluctuations are influenced by various factors, including equipment condition, freight markets, and age.

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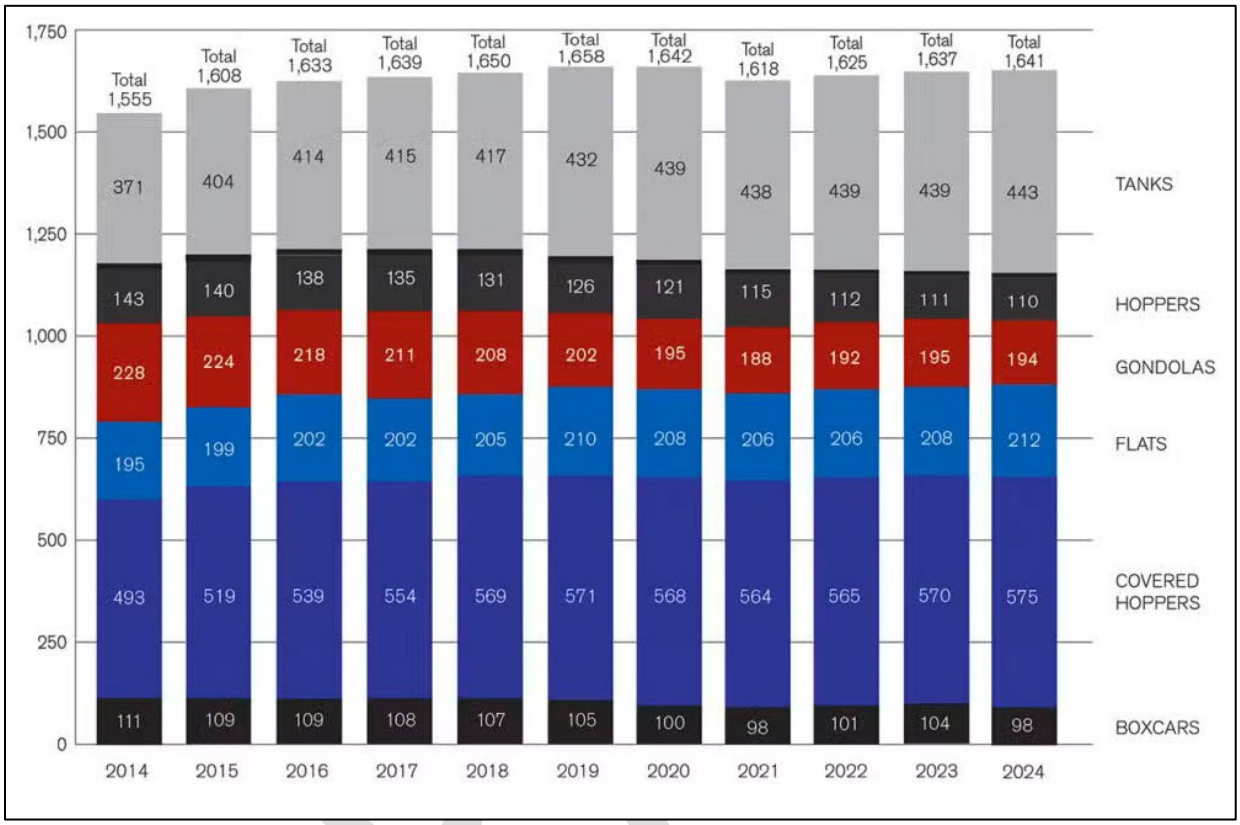
Figure 3-28. North American railcar fleet size (thousands)[48]



Source: Railway Age, April 7, 2025.

The Association of American Railroads sets guidelines governing how long a railcar may remain in interchange service, whereby a car is shared between railroads. For cars built after 1974, the Association specifies a usable interchange life of 50 years, with an option for extending service for up to an additional 15 years if certain conditions are met, including testing, key component replacements, and approval by the Association testing committee.

Approximately one-third of all revenue-generating railcars are owned by the railroads[49]. The majority are privately owned by shippers or third-party railcar leasing companies. Railroad ownership of freight cars has steadily declined as railroads seek to reduce capital investment in equipment and shift equipment ownership responsibility to shippers and railcar leasing companies.

[48] https://www.railwayage.com/mechanical/freight-cars/new-cars-trend-large/?__cf_chl_f_tk=j.Vjufv4aYDkdWIFKcPft7cwMdExSnGDmk0YAAIAH1I-1782751683-1.0.1.1-Dvlcdsn1D85LObrDcTFFjpSs6UsbJUN1mZNeNHSa7qM

[49] https://blog.tealinc.com/blog/understanding-railcar-ownership-vs.-leaseback

3.2.5.1 Railroad car types

Tank cars

Tank cars are used to ship liquid and gaseous commodities including industrial chemicals, slurries, biofuels, crude oil, liquified petroleum gas, and food grade liquids. Since 2014, the tank car fleet has increased 19.4 percent, or approximately 72,000 units. Growth across all these markets, particularly crude oil, has been the primary driver for tank car fleet expansion.

Hopper cars

Open-top hopper cars are used to ship ores, coal, minerals, and other aggregates that can be exposed to weather conditions. Hoppers are distinguished by having doors on the bottom of the cars which allow the contents to be unloaded through trap openings. The hopper fleet declined from approximately 228,000 units in 2014 to 198,000 units in 2024, a decrease of about 23 percent. This decline is largely attributable to reduced coal shipments as coal-fired power plants have been decommissioned or converted to natural gas.

Gondolas

Gondolas are open-top cars which typically carry freight that is not sensitive to weather conditions and can be unloaded by crane, magnet, or a rotary dumper which turns the entire car upside-down to empty the contents. Typical commodities include aggregates, minerals, scrap metal, irregular shaped loads, metals, steel, logs, waste, wood chips, sawdust, bark mulch, and recyclables. Gondolas can also be equipped with lids to prevent their loads being directly exposed to the elements. Since 2014, the gondola fleet has decreased by 14 percent, or 34,000 units. Similar to hopper cars, the decline reflects reduced demand for coal-dedicated gondolas as coal-based electricity generation has declined.

Flatcars

Flatcars encompass a broad range of uses and special-purpose equipment, including standard flatcars, center beams (used primarily for lumber), autoracks (finished vehicles), and intermodal cars. Intermodal equipment includes multiple-unit well cars capable of carrying double-stacked containers or truck trailers. Across all flatcars, the North American flatcar fleet grew by 8.7 percent, an increase of approximately 17,000 cars from 2014 to 2024. Commodities moved by flatcars, including lumber, automobiles, and intermodal have remained steady or grown over this period.

Covered hoppers

Covered hoppers are used for bulk commodities that must be protected from weather exposure. Typical shipments include corn, wheat, oats, milled products, cement, sand, ash, clay, fertilizers, phosphates, and plastic pellets. With few exceptions, these commodities have remained strong rail markets, resulting in corresponding fleet growth. Since 2014, approximately 79,000 covered hoppers have been added to the North American fleet, increasing the roster by 15.9 percent as of 2024.

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Boxcars

As illustrated in **Figure 3-29** Boxcars are among the most versatile freight cars, providing fully enclosed protection from weather, theft, and contamination. Boxcar-compatible commodities include consumer and retail goods, paper, pulp, pulpboard, lumber, insulation, building products, auto parts, industrial components, metals, palletized freight, canned goods, dry foods, and breakbulk shipments (large bags of bulk freight). Since 2014, the total boxcar fleet has declined by approximately13,000 units, or 11.7 percent.

Although the boxcar fleet has declined, newer boxcars generally provide greater carrying capacity than those being retired. For example, TTX—a national railcar pooling company owned by Class I railroads—reports that newer boxcars offer a load capacity of approximately 205,000 pounds, compared to 155,000 pounds for many older cars. Approximately 20,000 new boxcars have entered the North American fleet since 2016.[50] As older cars are retired, the boxcars fleet has converged toward two primary designs: 50' high cube and 60' high cube[51]. Both configurations can carry payloads of up to 100 tons, equivalent to roughly three to four truckloads of freight.[52] Despite the addition of new equipment, the Railway Supply Institute which represents owners, lessors, shippers, and suppliers has warned the Surface Transportation Board of an impending "boxcar cliff", whereby 22 percent of the fleet will reach mandated retirement by 2030. The Institute further notes that the fleet has decreased by approximately 38 percent since 2008, indicating that boxcar replacement rates have been insufficient.[53]

Figure 3-29. High-capacity TTX boxcars

[50] TTX Company. https://www.ttx.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ttx_infographic.pdf

[51] High cube means a boxcar with a "plate F" configuration, or height 17' above rail.

[52] TTX Company. https://www.ttx.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ttx_infographic.pdf

[53] Railway Age, March 26, 2024. https://www.railwayage.com/financeleasing/rsi-petitions-Surface Transportation Board-to-avert-boxcar-cliff/

3.2.5.2 Private Car Owner Issues with Railroad Service and Demurrage

As railroads have shifted freight car ownership to private entities, shippers and railcar leasing companies have invested in new equipment and expanded fleets to ensure capacity. Concurrently, railroads have enforced demurrage charges, which are fees assessed when private railcars remain on railroad property beyond a defined grace period.

From the perspective of shippers and private car owners, this creates a challenge because railroads ultimately control the movement of private railcars through their networks. Service degradation can require shippers to maintain larger fleets, reducing returns on private equipment investment.

Shipper associations have petitioned the Surface Transportation Board for remedies such as reciprocal demurrage, which would allow private car owners to charge railroads for excessive delays in moving private equipment.[54] This petition for rulemaking, formally titled the "Private Railcar Delay Charge," was submitted to the Surface Transportation Board on July 26, 2021. As of June 26, 2025, the Surface Transportation Board reported that it was unable to reach a majority decision on the petition, although the proceeding remains open.

3.2.5.3 Rail equipment pooling

To improve railcar utilization and efficiency, railroads participate in railcar pooling arrangements that allow shared ownership between railroads, enabling equipment to move freely across participating networks and be loaded at the most operationally efficient locations. Non-pooled railcars, whether privately or railroad-owned, may only be loaded by the owning entity. If such a car interchanges to another railroad, it must typically be returned empty to the owning entity, resulting in higher empty mileage. Pooling reduces empty miles, lowers capital costs, increases utilization, standardizes equipment, and provides operational flexibility that can respond to market conditions.

TTX plays a central role in railcar pooling. Of the 1.64 million North American railcars in service, approximately 177,000 (10.1 percent) are owned by TTX and assigned to pools. TTX owns approximately 37,000 boxcars and gondolas and more than 140,000 intermodal well cars.[55] Railroads may also pledge their own equipment to TTX or other pooling arrangements, depending on operational needs, market conditions, shipper requirements, and competitive considerations.

3.2.6 Freight rail issues and opportunities

The railroad system in Oregon is primarily a private enterprise, reliant on private capital to provide service and maintain its infrastructure, all while returning a profit to its investors. This system is a valuable asset to the public in that it helps sustain Oregon's economy, provides resilience and transportation options, and avoids public expenditures that would otherwise be necessary to provide transportation infrastructure, as explored in Section 3.2.4.5. The public also

[54] North America Freight Car Association, The National Grain and Feed Association (NGFA), The Chlorine Institute, and The National Oilseed Processors Association

[55] TTX Company. https://www.ttx.com/

benefits in that present-day intercity passenger rail service provided by Amtrak relies on infrastructure that is largely maintained at private expense.

Ensuring the vitality and future capability of the rail system is of public interest. Within this context, it is beneficial to understand current issues, constraints and opportunities, to identify which issues may be of broader public interest and thus warrant a potential policy response, and which should be addressed by the involved participants.

3.2.6.1 Key needs for freight

Primary freight rail needs can be divided into four categories, each of which are discussed below.

- **Physical:** Capacity needs and bottlenecks derived from system inventory information.
- **Service needs and connectivity gaps:** Improvements to how the rail system serves the state from a geographic perspective and how it might be better utilized.
- **Operational needs:** Includes considerations for freight system planning and operations including planning passenger service on shared freight corridors, the benefits of maintaining and improving rail system safety, and the role of freight rail in maintaining transportation system resiliency in the face of manmade and natural disasters.
- **Institutional needs:** An examination of the evolving role of the non-Class I railroads in a changing rail industry.

3.2.6.2 Infrastructure needs

Oregon's Rail Needs Inventory

A full accounting of current statewide identified rail infrastructure needs can be found in the Oregon Rail Needs Inventory included as Appendix C and described in Chapter 4 of this plan. This continuously evolving list of capital projects was developed to aid in a fluid prioritization of capital investments dependent on funding opportunity. The Rail Needs Inventory effectively records a list of discrete capital projects for eventual implementation on Oregon's rail network. A key feature of the Rail Needs Inventory is that project submissions can be made by many different entities, from the railroads themselves to eligible public entities such as cities at any time via an internet-based intake form.[56] Upon ODOT acceptance of a given project in accordance with goals and evaluation criteria, the project retroactively becomes a part of this State Rail Plan.

Class I infrastructure needs

All Class I trackage in Oregon is capable of carrying the standard 286,000-pound freight rail cars, and all but about 54 miles of the Oregon Trunk and 21 miles of the Gateway Subdivisions have Centralized Traffic Control but neither are cleared for double-stacked containers. However, if demand for rail traffic grows in the future as projected, the system will require further investments.

Using information collected through the Rail Needs Inventory, an assessment of potential bottlenecks that may occur as a result of growth in traffic was completed. The assessment

[56] https://www.oregon.gov/odot/rptd/pages/rail-needs-inventory-form.aspx

examined improvements for increasing capacity and eliminating bottlenecks on the mainline network in Oregon:

BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad both provided listings of potential or planned projects with a clear public interface in Oregon, which have been incorporated into the Rail Needs Inventory.

In general, responsibility for adapting to increasing freight traffic falls on the railroads themselves. As private entities, they are most attuned to market conditions and can respond to changing demand in multiple ways, of which physical improvements are only one option. Railroads take a variety of actions to respond to changing freight demands that include operational changes, marketing adjustments and capital improvements. Operational changes that optimize use of existing infrastructure are usually the first step, along with marketing adjustments. These can take the form of adjustments to pricing, availability of equipment, and frequency of service. If the growth is expected to be sustainable, then physical improvements can be considered, with the improvements having the lowest cost generally implemented first.

Class III railroad infrastructure needs

Class III railroads are generally formed to provide service to shippers on branch lines which were originally constructed, owned, and operated by Class I railroads but were sold or leased to the Class III railroad for various reasons, such as declining traffic, that a local railroad can more proactively address. This often means that the infrastructure of Class III railroads has been subject to deferred maintenance. This can limit the railroad's ability to provide effective service to new or existing customers, both by necessitating punishing speed restrictions and limiting the maximum weight of railcars which the railroads can carry.

Major operational issues facing Class III railroads include speed restrictions, weight restrictions, and vertical clearance restrictions often caused by bridges and tunnels. These issues are most prominent with Class III railroads in Oregon, and often their inability to accommodate heavier and/or larger equipment affects their financial performance, limits their growth and sometimes threatens their existence. For example, over 250 miles of non-Class I rail mileage is not up to generally accepted industry standards for carrying 286,000-pound loads, placing the shippers on those lines at an economic disadvantage due to the fact that they are unable to fully exploit the efficiencies of rail and fully interline with all Class I traffic.

Several elements characterize and differentiate the needs of Class III railroads from their Class I brethren. Infrastructure conditions such as weight restrictions, track class, and bridge conditions indicate whether the rail line can meet current and future requirements for freight service. The number of carloads and assessments of viability provide an indication of the continued viability of a line. Each of the factors examined is discussed below.

- **Percent of mileage that is 286,000-pound capable:** Rail lines that are not 286,000-pound compliant limit a railroad's ability to serve certain types of loads. Data on 286,000-pound capacity was obtained from a survey, initially conducted by ODOT in 2006, and updated regularly since then.

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- **Percent of track mileage that is Federal Railroad Administration Class 2+[57]:** Track class impacts a railroad's ability to serve certain types of loads and to achieve higher speed delivery. Portions of lines that do not meet Class 2 track standards (25 mph freight operating speed) can be costly to operate and not market competitive, particularly in attracting new business. It is ODOT's practice, whenever possible, to upgrade track to Federal Railroad Administration Class 2 when ODOT is a funding partner of an improvement project. Information on track class was also determined from the 2006 survey carried out by ODOT, updated with the most recent data.
- **Percent of mileage that uses 110+ pound rail:** Rail with a weight of at least 110 pounds per yard is considered the minimum under which loaded 286,000-pound railcars can be sustainably accommodated. While lighter weight rail can handle 286,000-pound railcars, it is at the cost of increased maintenance and impaired operations.
- **Number of bridges in poor condition:** The conditions of bridges located on 15 non-Class I lines were assessed in 2008 as part of the 2010 Oregon Rail Study. The evaluation looked at load capacity and lifespans of the bridges. The overall condition and suitability of a rail line to carry loads directly relates to the ability of bridges on the line to carry loads. Should these bridges not be improved, they will eventually impair the lines' long-term viability.

It is important to recognize that the challenges faced by the smaller railroads are not homogeneous. Larger non-Class I railroads, such as Portland & Western Railroad, Willamette & Pacific Railroad, and Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad, in general, have better track conditions than other non-Class I railroads, with much of their track mileage at more ideal weight and speed standards (286,000 pound capable, Class 2+ track, 110+b pound rail). Many smaller railroads, however, face far greater challenges, with some lines having deficient infrastructure.

Rail line condition is closely linked to the number of carloads on the line; lines in better condition are likely to attract more customers, and the revenue in turn can justify investments to improve the lines. See **Table 2-5** in Chapter 2 for Class III short line railroad carload data.

3.2.6.3 Specific non-Class I railroad needs

Portland & Western Railroad, which includes Willamette & Pacific Railroad: The Portland & Western was the largest non-Class I railroad in Oregon from a carload traffic perspective in 2024. Portland & Western's many branch lines carry commodities including aggregates, bricks and cement, chemicals, ethanol, construction and demolition debris, food, forest products, metallic ores and minerals, steel and scrap. While the railroad universally handles 286,000-pound shipments, about 45 percent of its route miles are restricted to 10 mph train speed. Some of these restricted segments are self-imposed and found in areas subject to congestion such as yards while others relate to practical safety issues where track exists longitudinally in streets, and trains contend with vehicular traffic. The majority of the railroad's Toledo District between Corvallis and Toledo, some 65 miles through the Coast Range, is limited to 10 mph due to an abundance of managerial caution rather than poorly maintained track. In contrast, track quality

[57] See Table 2-1, Railroad and track classifications

mandates 10 mph on other line segments such as the 5.3-mile Dallas District, the northern 26 miles of the West Side District, and the western end of the Astoria District.

Various degrees of deferred maintenance were in evidence when these lines were transferred to short line stewardship and over the past quarter century declining business volumes have failed to generate enough revenue for capital improvements, such as heavier rail and robust tie replacement. In January of 2023, Portland & Western filed for abandonment of its 5.4-mile Forest Grove District, which had not hosted commercial traffic since 2015[58]. This branch, which has now been removed, exemplified the legacy of deferred maintenance; its track consisted of the original 70-pound rail laid from when the line was built in 1906 and minimal traffic during the past several decades could not justify upgrades. Similarly, the westernmost end of the Astoria branch last saw trains in 2005. In early 2020, Portland & Western filed and received approval for the discontinuance of service over the line west of Wauna. It has remained unused but intact since[59].

Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad: Central Oregon & Pacific operates between Eugene and Northern California, providing north-south service moving lumber, logs, and plywood of national account lumber companies. The line is fairly well maintained at Federal Railroad Administration Class 2, and handles 286,000-pound cars, but it also has a high number of bridges reaching the end of their life cycle. A portion of the line over the Siskiyou Mountains from Ashland, Oregon to Montague, California was rehabilitated and restored to service with the assistance of a Federal TIGER grant in November 2015 after a 7-year shutdown. However, in 2025, Roseburg Forest Products closed its veneer plant in Weed, California, resulting in the indefinite closure of the line. The segment between Ashland and Weed is at risk of abandonment in the future.

Rogue Valley Terminal Railroad: The Rogue Valley Terminal currently transports wood products, asphalt, cement, chemicals, and fly ash and has steadily grown carload volumes under new ownership. Rogue Valley's trackage is a legacy of a World War II Army cantonment (Camp White), so heavier rail and new ties are required to safely maintain service and continue growing.

Coos Bay Rail Line: In May 2018, the Oregon International Port of Coos Bay (Port), owner of the railroad between Eugene and Coquille, incorporated Coos Bay Rail Line, a non-profit entity, to succeed the then-current operator, Coos Bay Rail Link. The transfer from Link to Line occurred on November 1, 2018, and Coos Bay Rail Line has operated the railroad since. Because of the Coast Range and abundant wetlands, the railroad includes nine tunnels and thousands of feet of trestles and bridges, including three major center swing-span movable bridges. Built between 1913 and 1916, nearly all structures (tunnels and bridges) on the line are coming due for replacement or major renewal. Over the past decade, the line has successfully applied for a number of state and federal grants that have permitted stabilization of the tunnels and some bridge repairs. Although much rehabilitation has occurred, there remains a significant backlog of work to achieve a uniform state of good repair.

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[58] Federal Register, Portland & Western Railroad, Inc.-Abandonment Exemption-in Washington County, Or. January 26, 2023, https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/01/26/2023-01580/portland-and-western-railroad-inc-abandonment-exemption-in-washington-county-or

[59] *The Trainmaster*, March 2020 https://pnwc-nrhs.org/Trainmaster2020/TM-2020-03.pdf

The proposed Pacific Coast Intermodal Port project is a public/private partnership with the Port and NorthPoint Development to develop a new terminal for container ships in Coos Bay. The total cost estimate for the project is $2.3 billion[60]. The plans for this new terminal depend extensively on moving containers on the railroad inland to/from markets across the country. Thus, the relationship between the Port and its railroad is truly symbiotic.

As of 2024, the Port reports that the railroad now moves roughly $460 million in freight annually, has kept more than 185,000 trucks off the road since reopening, and still carries a traffic base dominated by forest products, with about 89 percent of current shipments tied to the timber industry. At the same time, the line remains financially constrained[61]. In the Port's fiscal year 2024 audit, Coos Bay Rail Line reported 5,348 car movements, down 504 from the prior year, and the rail line fund ended the year with a negative net position of about $1.66 million. Budget documents in that same audit show actual fiscal year 2024 carload revenue of about $3.13 million, well below budget. However, the Port has secured a series of significant federal grants in recent years, aimed at stabilizing aging infrastructure, planning new infrastructure, and advancing the Pacific Coast Intermodal Port project planning. These include:

- $20 million Better Utilizing Infrastructure to Leverage Development grant (2019) for bridge rehabilitation and replacement.
- $9.88 million Federal award (2020) supporting tie replacement and track surfacing.
- $29.7 million Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant (2024) to fund engineering and design for comprehensive upgrades to tunnels, bridges, track, and signal systems related to the project.
- $3.99 million Railroad Crossing Elimination grant (2025) to support planning and design for a grade separation project in Reedsport to improve safety.
- $25 million INFRA grant (2024) funding environmental review, permitting, and design for the project.
- $11.25 million Port Development Infrastructure Program grant (2026) for the project.[62]

All other non-Class I railroads with poor condition and little to no traffic: The remaining rail lines that are in poor condition also suffer from having little to no traffic. It is hard to say whether one caused the other, but some of the decreases in traffic are due to the decreased activity by traditional rail-oriented industries. Over the past several decades, the economy of the state of Oregon has been evolving from a traditional reliance upon resource extraction focused on timber to agriculture, high-tech electronics, and recreational tourism. However, many industries still exist on these rail lines that could ship freight by rail; thus, investments in track and structures may help stave off further spirals of decreasing traffic and bolster first- and last-mile freight rail service.

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[60] https://pcipproject.com/about-pcip

[61] https://www.portofcoosbay.com/reedsport-overpass-project-receives-federal-support-enabling-safer-rail-expansion

[62] https://www.portofcoosbay.com/port-of-coos-bay-awarded-11-million-grant-to-advance-rail-infrastructure-for-pacific-coast-intermodal-port

3.2.6.4 Abandonment risks and impacts

Understanding the potential of at-risk rail lines to be abandoned is critical for several reasons. The first is loss of transportation options to current and potential industries. Once abandoned, a rail line is very difficult to reconstruct; thus, rail service may be lost forever. Not only is rail line construction physically intensive, but right-of-way encroachment that happens while the line is embargoed or in a state of disrepair may also seriously impede re-establishment of service. Interim conversions to trail use, which may have valid multimodal benefits, are difficult to convert back to active rail use and must be appropriately evaluated.

It is very difficult to calculate the economic impact of abandonments. The impacts may be small if there are no existing industries that are served by the line or if there are competitive options from other modes. However, in other cases, the impacts may be severe and result in significantly higher transportation costs. Some states have conducted rail abandonment impact studies to quantify the effect of short line rail abandonments through a benefit-cost analysis. For instance, a 2003 study by Kansas Department of Transportation estimated that abandonment of non-Class I railroads in the state resulted in $58 million road damage costs, $20 million transportation and handling costs, and $1.3 million in incremental highway safety costs. If Kansas farmers were to absorb these costs, the farm income would decline by $20.5 million. Rail preservation projects should take into consideration the full cost and benefit of preserving a rail line.

In 2025, ODOT estimated which lines in the state have the greatest risk for abandonment, as shown in **Table 3-4**. In total, roughly 315 route miles of track in Oregon are at risk for abandonment. Apart from situations where a county is served exclusively by an at-risk rail line, this assessment does not permit assessing the degree to which the closure of an at-risk rail line is likely to impact overall rail service in that county. The commodity flow forecast county level data does not provide the geographic resolution necessary to examine the future development of traffic volumes among the industries that are specifically served by an at-risk rail line. This requires additional research, including a more detailed examination of the rail-oriented industrial sectors that exist at present, or might develop in the future, in the affected counties.

Lake, Wallowa, Clatsop and Umatilla are counties in Oregon that each have rail mileage operated by a single at-risk railroad. The impact of losing the service of any of these at-risk railroads in these counties can result in about 3 million tons of movements by other modes by 2035 that could have “potentially” been moved by rail. This is roughly equivalent to about 500 truckloads a day.

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Table 3-4. Rail lines at risk for abandonment 2019-2025

Name of Railroad	At-risk segments
Portland & Western Railroad	Astoria District – no customers beyond Wauna (22.5 mi)
Willamette & Pacific Railroad	Dallas District – no customers (5.3 mi)
Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad	Ashland to CA State Line – no traffic (23 mi in OR + 55 mi in CA)
Albany & Eastern Railroad	Sweet Home Branch – low traffic (17 mi)
Goose Lake Railway	Entire line – low traffic (15 mi in OR + 40 mi in CA)
Willamette Valley Railway	Southern two-thirds embargoed since 2012 for storm damage; no traffic (23 mi)
Oregon Pacific Railroad	Liberal (Molalla Ave.) to Molalla – track removed (3 mi)
Wallowa Union Railroad	No freight traffic (63 mi)
Coos Bay Rail Line	More volume needed for sustainability (134 mi)
Hampton Railway, Inc.	No customers – service provided by Portland & Western Railroad (5.2 mi)
Longview Portland & Northern Railway	Dormant – no traffic (~4 mi)

Source: Oregon Department of Transportation, 2025.

3.2.6.5 Resiliency

The transportation system in Oregon may face a number of seismic and weather-related disaster situations (e.g., earthquakes and tsunamis, heavy snowfall, avalanches, landslides, wildfires, washouts, and flooding) that, without proper planning, could disrupt services for a significant amount of time. Rail has been and may in the future be able to play an important role in restoring lifeline transportation services if other modes are unable to recover quickly. Thus, understanding the vulnerabilities and recovery strategies for freight rail is an important consideration for the rail system in Oregon.

One attempt to assess overall transportation system resiliency was conducted by the Oregon Seismic Safety Policy Advisory Commission in 2013. This analysis focuses on resiliency and response focused on an earthquake or tsunami associated with the Cascadia subduction zone. The report notes that most bridges and other transportation infrastructure in western Oregon would be susceptible to major damage. Also, there are many unstable slopes and pre-existing deep slides that are expected to fail. The report also looked at transportation system interdependency and determined the potential role of certain rail system elements to provide some redundancy to a basic backbone highway system.

3.2.6.6 *Wildfire Impacts on Oregon Railroads*

Wildfire has had a major impact on railroads in the Pacific Northwest, especially within the state of Oregon. **Table 3-5** outlines recent fire incidents with devastating impacts. Although railroad-caused wildfires are relatively uncommon in Oregon, the larger risk is wildfires damaging vulnerable railroad infrastructure such as wooden bridges, ties, and rural branch lines. These

recent wildfires show that even a single bridge loss can eliminate rail service for months and force freight onto highways. The resulting shift to highway trucking compounds roadway congestion, degrades pavement infrastructure, and drives up carbon emissions as explored in **Section 3.2.4.5.** However, with requisite funding, railroad infrastructure can often be rehabilitated in the aftermath of a major event faster than other overland transportation infrastructure, as was demonstrated by the 2021 Lava Fire, after which Union Pacific Railroad rebuilt the Dry Canyon bridge in a matter of weeks. However, rural branch short lines often do not have the same access to resources as do Class I railroads.

Table 3-5. Recent Regional Wildfires and Corresponding Railroad Impacts

Year	Fire	Impacts
2026	Lower Dry Creek Fire	• 8,100 acres burned • Two railroad bridges destroyed • Direct rail service to Weston lost
2026	BNSF Locomotive Fire	• Rail service temporarily disrupted
2025	Rowena Fire	• Burned approximately 3,700 acres in the Columbia River Gorge
2024	Durkee Fire	• Burned alongside a roughly 25–30-mile stretch of Union Pacific's Huntington subdivision, threatening railroad ties and tracks.
2022	Cedar Creek Fire	• Rail service disrupted although track not damaged
2020	Willamette Valley Fires	• Locomotive destroyed near Molalla • Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad heavily damaged, over 1,500 burned railroad ties
2021	Lava Fire	• Destroyed Union Pacific's Dry Canyon Bridge • Rerouted 221 trains and cancelled Coast Starlight
2017	Eagle Creek Fire	• Closed Union Pacific Portland Subdivision through Columbia River Gorge • Freight services delayed 24-48 hours

Common themes

Wooden bridges are the most vulnerable railroad assets as recent fires within the Pacific Northwest have shown (**Figure 3-30**). Another major vulnerability is short line railroads and branch lines usually do not have any route redundancy. This means that in many cases, one damaged bridge can shut down an entire railroad segment. Additionally, private short lines have fewer funding options for emergency reconstruction than larger rail companies and systems. Even within larger systems and when infrastructure does survive, the smoke, firefighting operations, and evacuation zones can temporarily stop train operations.

Potential mitigation measures

As demonstrated by the 2026 BNSF locomotive fire, expanding vegetation clearing around bridges, tunnels, and high-risk locations are a major mitigation measure that should be thoroughly considered. The increased inspection of brakes, bearings, and exhaust systems during fire season is also highly recommended. To prevent fires, there must be restrictions in place for welding and grinding during periods of extreme fire danger. Regarding overall infrastructural

resiliency to wildfires, replacing or retrofitting vulnerable infrastructure such as wooden bridges with more fire-resistant materials should be considered where practical as well. Other mitigation measures for policy consideration include developing emergency repair funding programs for rural branch and short line railroads and using statewide wildfire-risk mapping resources to identify the railroad segments most vulnerable to future fires.

Figure 3-30. Lower Dry Creek Fire at MP 26.6 Before and After Photos (July 2026)

3.2.7 Institutional needs

3.2.7.1 The evolving role of Class III lines

The relationship between Class III and Class I railroads is one of continuous evolution. Class III railroads serve a very important role in the North American rail sector. Overall, around one-quarter to one-fifth of traffic handled by Class I railroads begins and/or ends their trip on a short line railroad. For BNSF Railway, short lines accounted for 30 percent of its originating and terminating carload freight movement in 2025.[63] For Union Pacific, short line-related traffic accounted for approximately 20 percent of volume.[64] In Oregon, Class I railroads are particularly reliant on their short line connections to serve the forest products industry, one of the state's key freight-oriented sectors.

From the perspective of the Class I railroads, short lines serve several functions:

- Provide access to customers that are not within reach of the Class I.
- Afford operationally intensive functions that Class I railroads have difficulty providing from a cost and service management standpoint. This is often the case in the provision of switching services to industries and public transloading facilities. For example, some industries require frequent switching that a Class I carrier could not provide economically.

[63] https://www.bnsf.com/news-media/railtalk/service/shortline-select-program.html

[64] https://www.up.com/customers/within-reach/short_line/index.htm

- Serve as a retailer to smaller shippers that do not produce sufficient volume for a Class I carrier to service directly. From the short line's perspective, smaller shippers boost overall volumes, and thus the viability of the railroad. From the Class I perspective, having short lines perform the function of aggregating traffic boosts volumes while transferring the disproportionate costs associated with switching and managing customers to other parties.
- Provide access to rail service away from Class I mainlines. The increasingly intensive utilization of many Class I mainlines has made it more operationally difficult and costly to serve customers located on many mainlines. Thus, serving a shipper on a short line may be more cost effective, even with potential dilution of revenues.

The common thread for all these functions is the ability for the Class I carrier to use a short line connection to complement its services. The basis for the relationship is the revenue and profit potential that the Class I carrier can derive from a particular service. This includes options that might exclude the short line entirely. For example, instead of using the short line to directly reach the customer, the Class I could offer to route it through a port, logistics center, or transload facility that is located on the Class I railroad. Or the Class I carrier could offer an intermodal container option in lieu of a shipment of the freight via a traditional railcar.

Beyond the issue of the specific profitability of a particular short line's traffic to its Class I connection(s) lies the broader issue of the Class I railroad's outlook on carload service, i.e. the traditional practice of having trains carry traffic associated with multiple customers and destinations. Individual Class I railroads have varying perspectives on carload service. Some view it as a core business with a strong future, while others view it as an increasingly niche product lacking in growth potential. These perspectives affect the carrier's overall strategies towards carload traffic, including investment, operations, pricing, as well as their approach to short lines. As has always been the case, to a substantial degree, the successful short line will have to take its cues from its Class I connections. In the future, these will be marked by:

- Increased use of higher volume multicar shipments, high-capacity equipment (286,000 pound) and generally greater concentration of traffic;
- Opportunistic shifting of carload services to short lines as Class I railroads seek to minimize handling of trains which contain cars to and from multiple destinations;
- With some exceptions, the role of Class I carriers in supplying equipment for short line-originated traffic will continue to diminish;
- Improved integration of service and visibility across an entire move, through adoption of integrative technologies such as interline service management; and
- Implementation of improved Interchange Service Agreements that clearly define service standards for traffic interchanged between a short line and its Class I connection.

The primary beneficiaries of these strategies will be the well-capitalized and more successful short lines that can afford to effectively engage their Class I connections. The successful short lines will keep up with the Class I service initiatives and successfully advocate to invest in their physical infrastructure to efficiently serve their customers with modern equipment. These trends may favor the short line holding companies which own multiple short line railroads, often within the same vicinity. These short line holding companies can wield greater leverage over their

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Class I connections as they influence large volumes of rail traffic, maintain geographic diversity in their business, and have a broad range of issues with varying priorities. In contrast, single property short lines with modest or low traffic volumes (especially with a single interchange with a Class I railroad) may find new challenges to maintain market-competitive service.

3.2.7.2 Regulatory issues affecting Class I - short line relationships

An additional consideration affecting commercial relations between Class I railroads and their short line connections is Federal regulation as administered by the Surface Transportation Board. In recent years, the Surface Transportation Board has taken a more active role in examining competitive issues, including some that directly affect short lines. These include paper barriers, expanded industry switching access, and bottleneck rates.

Paper barriers and competitive industry switching have received particularly intense attention. Paper barriers[65] describe the common practice of controlling access to interchanges through legal agreements between the divesting carrier and the buyer or lessee. The trade-off for the party acquiring the railroad is a lower acquisition cost in return for the divesting carrier having greater control over the traffic handled by the short line. However, the existence of these barriers can sometimes impede the ability of a short line to handle specific traffic, thereby impacting its economic viability and limiting shipper service options. Thus far, the Surface Transportation Board has not taken direct action to regulate paper barriers in line sales, but it has proposed requiring additional information for new transactions.[66]

Competitive industry switching access would permit carriers to gain access to customers that are presently captive to a single carrier. Presently there is a proposal before the Surface Transportation Board that would allow a competing carrier to gain access to a captive industry that is located within 30 miles of the interchange point under certain specific conditions.[67] Proponents feel that this expanded access would restore some competitive balance in a rail industry that has come to be dominated by six large Class I carriers. The Class I railroads are strongly opposed to this proposal, as they feel that implementation would substantially complicate operations, reduce rail revenues, profitability, and thereby the ability to make the investment necessary to keep up with capacity needs and competitive service requirements.

[65] See Ex Parte 714, Information Required in Notices and Petitions Containing Interchange Commitments.

[66] http://www.Surface Transportation Board.dot.gov/Decisions/readingroom.nsf/WEBUNID/C9E40181B718CD1485257AA9004BA42A?OpenDocument

[67] Ex Parte 711, Petition for Rulemaking to Adopt Revised Competitive Switching Rules, http://www.Surface Transportation Board.dot.gov/

3.3 Passenger rail profile

There are three intercity passenger rail services within Oregon: Amtrak Cascades, *Empire Builder*, and *Coast Starlight*. The State of Oregon typically focuses on Amtrak Cascades, which is a state-supported intercity passenger rail service. The federal government largely funds Amtrak's *Empire Builder* and *Coast Starlight* long-distance passenger services. However, the state recognizes the significant benefits of all three passenger services and therefore includes them in this analysis. Beyond these existing services, this assessment also examines potential new services that could address growing travel demand between certain markets.

3.3.1 Rail passenger service needs

3.3.1.1 Overview

ODOT seeks to continue improving the performance, safety, and reliability of the passenger rail network in Oregon. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the Amtrak Cascades corridor is part of the Federal Railroad Administration Corridor Identification and Development Program, which is intended to accelerate funding for improvement projects in this corridor. Specific rail service needs include the following:

1. Improve Amtrak Cascades service along the Willamette Valley, which connects the state's largest metropolitan areas, through additional frequencies, reduced travel times, and station improvements and expansions.
2. Improve on-time performance to meet Federal Railroad Administration standards[68] for passenger service trains serving the state, with particular attention to state-supported Amtrak Cascades services.
3. Expand rail passenger service markets by working with local communities to enhance multimodal connections to and from intercity rail stations, including commuter rail, other intercity passenger services, and additional transit options.

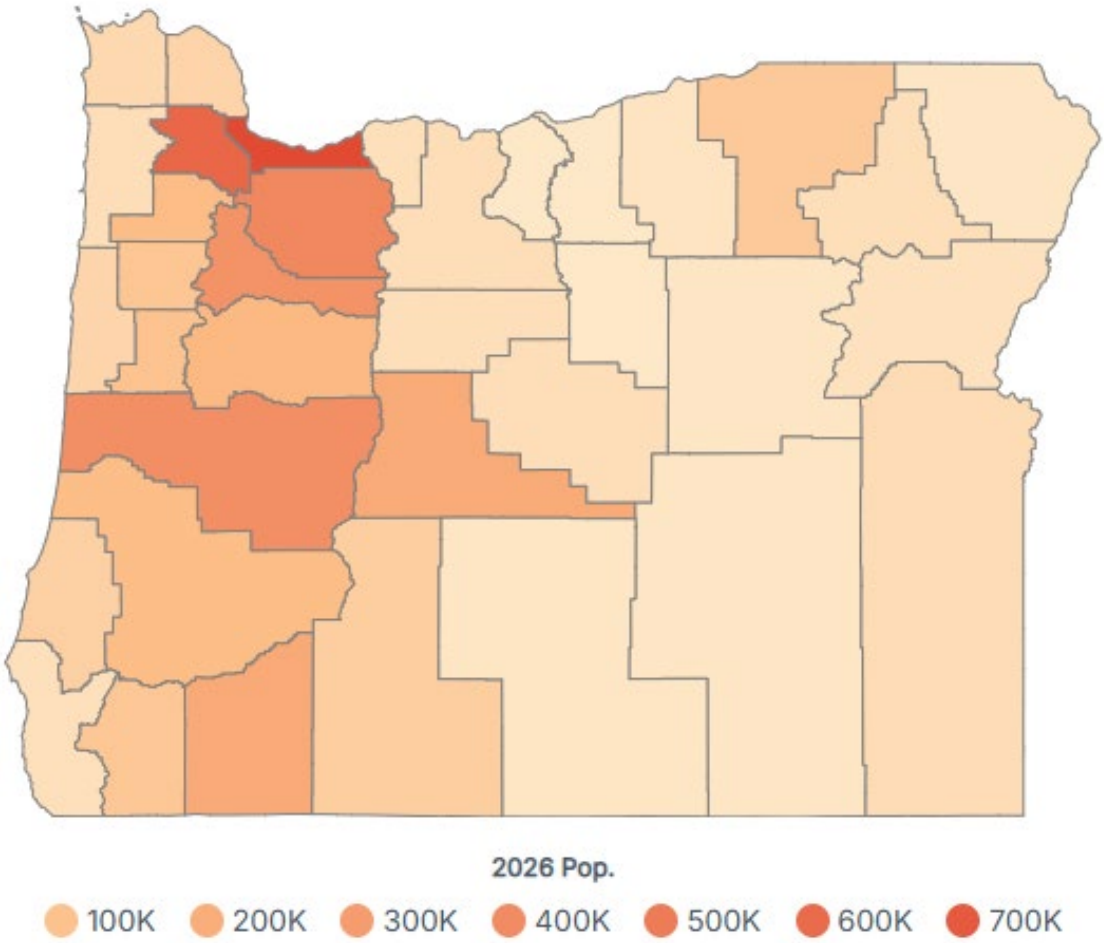
3.3.1.2 Population in Oregon

As of July 2025, Oregon's population is estimated at 4.27 million. Population density is concentrated in the western region, particularly along the I-5 corridor (**Figure 3-31.**). The top five most populated counties in the state are Multnomah, Washington, Clackamas, Lane, and Marion, all of which are within the I-5 corridor.

Despite post-pandemic growth rates slowing, population growth is expected to show a positive increase in the future, reaching 4.516 million in 2035, with an average annual growth rate of 0.5% between 2025 and 2035.[69] This growth will continue to drive travel demand along the I-5 corridor and surrounding areas. Of Oregon's ten largest cities, eight lie within 20 miles of the Amtrak route, positioning these areas to contribute to future passenger rail demand.[70]

[68] See section 2.4.3.2 On-Time Performance
[69] Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, Population and Demographic Outlook, https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Documents/demographic.pdf.
[70] Oregon Cities by Population, 2026 https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/oregon.

Figure 3-31. Oregon counties by population[71]



3.3.2 Amtrak Cascades

3.3.2.1 Ridership forecasts

Amtrak Cascades service experienced record ridership and revenue in 2024 and a slight decrease in 2025 due to an equipment shortage; however, both years exceeded pre-pandemic levels in both metrics. Annual ridership approached 1 million passengers for the entire corridor, with the summer months marking the peak travel season. A major factor in this growth was the addition of two more daily roundtrips between Seattle and Portland in December 2023. Ridership increases outpaced the 3.6 percent average annual growth rate forecast in the 2006 Oregon Transportation Plan, despite the economic recession and global pandemic. Between 2006 and 2025, Amtrak Cascades ridership also grew faster than Oregon's statewide population (around 1.0 percent annually), suggesting that intercity passenger rail is gaining market share relative to other modes.[72] Overall, these trends indicate steadily growing demand for intercity rail services.

[71] https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/oregon.
[72] https://www.oregon.gov/das/oea/Documents/demographic.pdf.

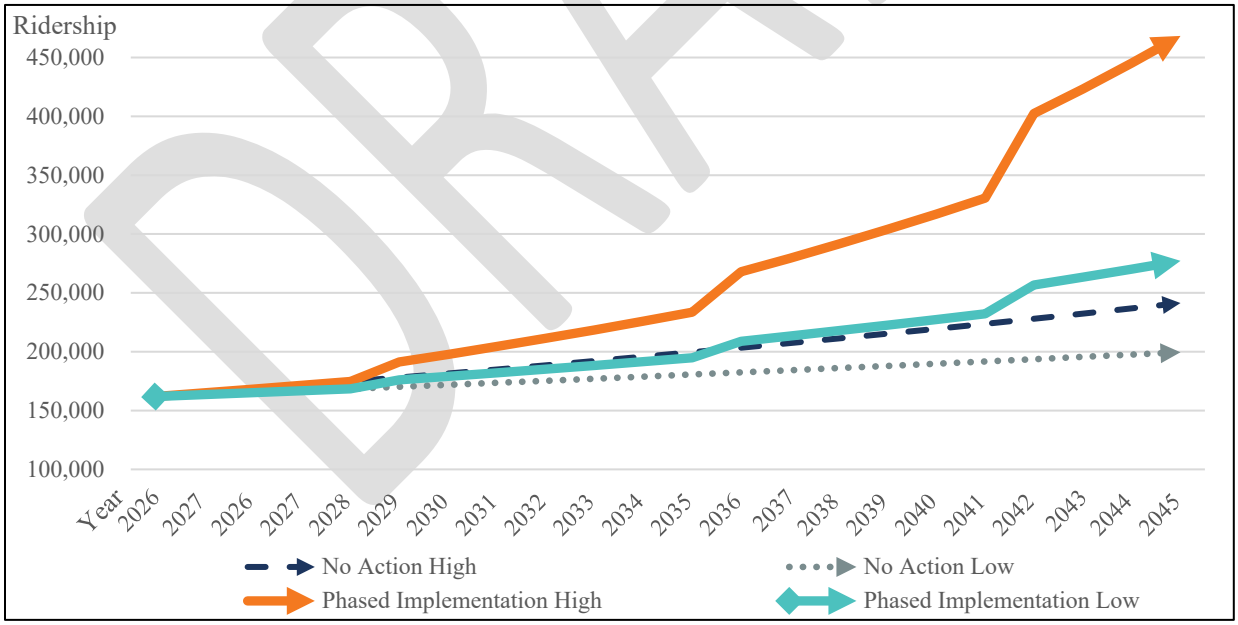
Seattle–Portland segment

Ridership forecasts are drawn from the Amtrak Cascades 2024 Preliminary Service Development Plan, which was the first step in creating a comprehensive blueprint for improving the corridor. The plan provides forecasts for Vancouver–Seattle, Seattle–Portland, Portland–Eugene, and the entire Amtrak Cascades corridor.[73] The Preliminary Service Development Plan assumed physical and operational improvements by 2045 that would allow more than 12 roundtrips between Seattle and Portland. With these improvements, Amtrak projected that ridership would increase from 935,500 passengers in 2024 to 1,994,000 passengers by 2045. The Portland–Seattle segment is expected to have the highest number of trips of all the segments: This segment will have about 61 percent to 64 percent of all trips in the corridor by 2045.

Portland–Eugene segment

For the Portland–Eugene segment, additional ridership analysis and projections were performed, assuming physical and operational improvements by 2045 that would allow six roundtrips by that year, thus increasing frequency and reliability of service. **Figure 3-32** presents projected annual Amtrak Cascades ridership from 2024 to 2045 under four service scenarios, using high and low demand response assumptions to illustrate the range of potential ridership outcomes resulting from increased service frequency. With service improvements and high demand assumptions, projected ridership for Amtrak Cascades would increase from 164,660 passengers in 2024 to 475,000 by 2045, an annual growth rate of approximately 5.2 percent.

Figure 3-32. Projected growth of Amtrak cascades ridership between Portland and Eugene



[73] https://wsdot.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-06/Amtrak-Cascades-2024-Preliminary-Service-Development-Plan.pdf.

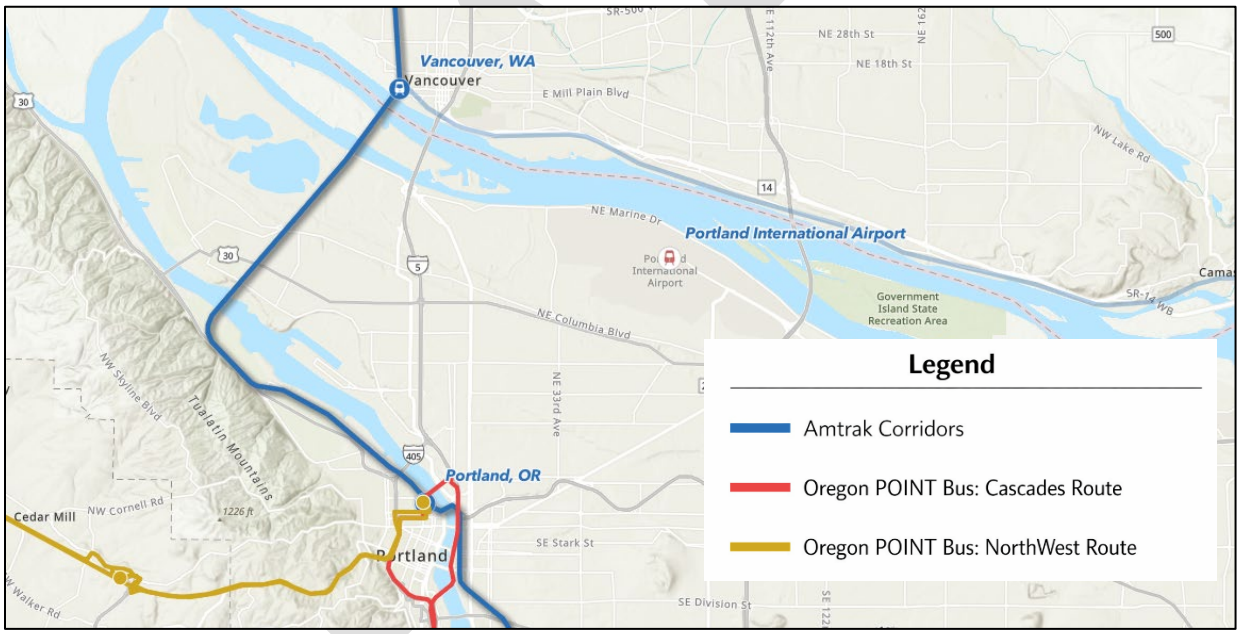
3.3.2.2 Challenges to improving Amtrak Cascades service

This section outlines key infrastructure constraints to consider for Amtrak Cascades. For further information, the Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan, which is currently being updated, provides detailed analysis and corridor-specific improvement proposals. However, because Amtrak Cascades is part of the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program, it is eligible for funding to address these issues.

Portland, Oregon, to Vancouver, Washington, challenges

Amtrak Cascades (as well as the *Empire Builder* and *Coast Starlight*) trains operate over a 10-mile segment owned by BNSF Railway and shared with Union Pacific Railroad between Portland Union Station and Vancouver, Washington. This corridor section, as shown in **Figure 3-33.** also includes Oregon POINT bus service. Projected growth in freight volumes could create a critical bottleneck along this continuous double-track segment. Corridor improvements, such as adding sections of third mainline track and passing sidings, making signal improvements, upgrading bridge locks, and adding higher-speed crossovers, could help mitigate train delays and accommodate anticipated growth in travel demand north of Portland.

Figure 3-33. Portland to Vancouver[74]



Portland to Eugene challenges

Between Eugene and Portland Union Station, Amtrak Cascades trains operate on Union Pacific-owned track along a 124-mile corridor that consists primarily of single track with passing sidings, along with a 5.8-mile double-track segment between Willsburg Junction (in Milwaukie, Oregon, just south of Portland) and Portland Union Station. **Figure 3-34.** shows a map of the corridor, including both existing rail service and Oregon POINT bus services. Passing sidings are spaced an average of 9 miles apart. Growing freight demand could increase congestion in this

[74] Oregon State Rail Plan Online GIS Map

corridor, leading to longer travel times and reduced on-time performance. ODOT, in partnership with Amtrak and Union Pacific, has identified a suite of infrastructure projects which is designed to reduce conflicts between passenger and freight rail in the corridor while allowing for the provision of up to six Amtrak Cascades roundtrips per day in addition to the daily *Coast Starlight* roundtrip.

Figure 3-34. Portland to Eugene[75]

Stations, parking, and other amenities

Amtrak and other passenger rail stakeholders have not identified significant near-term needs for new stations or major expansions of existing stations or parking facilities, except for those at

[75] Oregon State Rail Plan Online GIS Map.

Portland Union Station (see discussion in Section 3-57, below). However, maintaining and growing ridership in support of state goals will require Amtrak, public transit providers, and Oregon POINT connecting bus services to offer competitive travel times, cost, comfort, and convenience relative to motor vehicle travel on I-5 and air travel. Regular assessments of station facilities can help ensure that stations continue to meet customer needs, including facility condition, amenities (such as Wi-Fi), vehicle and bicycle parking, bikeshare and car sharing facilities (where feasible), Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, micromobility access, and transit connections to support intermodal connectivity.

3.3.3 Summary of proposed Amtrak Cascades improvements

3.3.3.1 Increases in service

The Amtrak Cascades Oregon corridor connects many of the state's most densely populated areas. The corridor currently offers two daily roundtrips between Portland and Eugene, along with one additional roundtrip on the *Coast Starlight*. As shown in Figure 2-16, ridership has grown significantly since the pandemic. ODOT has a Federal Railroad Administration-approved Service Development Plan that describes how to increase passenger rail frequencies from three to seven daily roundtrips over the next 20 years. This increase in daily roundtrips will help the state accommodate rising travel demand along this corridor.

3.3.3.2 Portland Union Station

Owned by the City of Portland, Union Station's main building and annex (**Figure 3-35**) require seismic upgrades and rehabilitation to bring this historic structure into a state of good repair and support future increases in service frequency (see Oregon Rail Needs Inventory, Appendix C). The station tracks and platforms also need upgrades, including improvements to drainage, electrical systems, and potable water connections.

Figure 3-35. Portland Union Station

3.3.3.3 Proposed infrastructure improvements

ODOT, in collaboration with Union Pacific Railroad, the Federal Railroad Administration, and Amtrak, developed a prioritized corridor project inventory of track and siding projects for the Service Development Plan update that is consistent with the Corridor Identification and Development Program requirements. These capacity improvements will reduce scheduling conflicts between freight and passenger rail, improving on-time performance and overall reliability of both passenger and freight services, and will support the expansion of Amtrak Cascades service between Portland and Eugene. The full list of priority projects, a brief description, conceptual cost estimates, and corresponding project Stage is provided in **Table 3-6** and shown on **Figure 3-36**.

The proposed Service Development Plan infrastructure improvements are organized into three implementation stages, each supporting expansion of Amtrak Cascades service between Portland and Eugene:

- **Stage 1:** Enables the addition of a third Amtrak Cascades roundtrip
- **Stage 2:** Enables the addition of a fourth Amtrak Cascades roundtrip
- **Stage 3:** Enables the addition of a fifth and sixth Amtrak Cascades roundtrip

This corridor project inventory list forms the basis for further preliminary engineering and design efforts between Amtrak, ODOT, and Union Pacific. It is anticipated that these projects will move into Step 3 of the Corridor Identification and Development Program process, during which more specific preliminary engineering, design, and environmental work will be performed, and detailed cost estimates will be developed for each project and stage of work. Using the tried-and-true incremental improvement process, additional Amtrak Cascades service can be introduced at the completion of all projects at each stage. Progression of these projects is dependent on the availability of state funding as the Corridor Identification and Development program will currently fund 80 percent of the cost of each project, meaning that while Oregon may enjoy an effective 80 percent discount on this infrastructure development, the remaining 20 percent will still need to be covered by the State and local partners.

Table 3-6. Portland to Eugene priority passenger projects

Project	Priority	Description	Stage
Swain/Irving	1-A	Connect Swain and Irving sidings to provide a second main track, upgrade existing Swain siding to main line standards. Creates two main tracks from milepost 653.4 to milepost 659.13. Add a single crossover at milepost 652.3.	1
Eugene	1-B	Add 800-foot siding track at the station for passenger trains.	1
Willsburg Jct./ Clackamas	2	Construct a second main track from Willsburg Jct. (milepost 764.9) to Clackamas siding (milepost 760.8). Add four crossovers. Results in two main tracks from milepost 759.3 to milepost 770.	1
Woodburn/ Gervais Phase 1	3	Phase 1: Connect Woodburn and Gervais sidings. Combined phase 1 siding length is from milepost 732.2 to milepost 734.4 (2.2 miles) with two universal crossovers.	1

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Project	Priority	Description	Stage
Salem/ Renard	4	Connect Salem Yard and extend Renard Siding. Expanded Renard siding is from milepost 713.9 to milepost 716.1. Extend Salem yard lead south to connect. Extend Salem yard lead north to approximately milepost 718.3. Add one universal crossover.	1
Irving/ Eugene Phase 1	5	Perform right-of-way and utility work for extending Eugene siding track to Irving (from milepost 647.5 to milepost 652.4).	1
Millersburg	6	Extend Millersburg siding north. Expanded siding is from milepost 694.5 to milepost 697.6 (3 miles).	2
Shedd Phase 1	7	Phase 1: Extend Shedd siding north. Phase 1 expanded siding limit is from milepost 677.7 to milepost 681.25 with one universal crossover.	2
Irving/Eugene Phase 2	8	Connect Eugene siding track to Irving with a second main track (from milepost 647.5 to milepost 652.32). Construct a double crossover at milepost 652.32.	2
Woodburn/ Gervais Phase 2	9	Phase 2: Extend Gervais siding south 2.3 miles. Full length of combined siding is from milepost 730.1 to milepost 734.4, with two universal crossovers.	3
Albany/ Hallawell	10	Extend Albany yard lead and Hallawell siding. Extended Centralized Traffic Control siding length will be from milepost 687.2 to milepost 690.2 and will connect with Albany yard lead. Add two additional crossovers.	3
Shedd Phase 2	11	Phase 2: Extend Shedd siding south. Fully expanded Shedd siding limits are from milepost 675.35 to milepost 681.25 with one universal crossover, providing 6 miles of passing track capacity.	3
Judkins	12	Extend Judkins siding south. Expanded siding would be from milepost 621.2 to milepost 645.7 (1.8 miles)[76] and allow for staging of freight trains outside the Amtrak Cascades service area.	3

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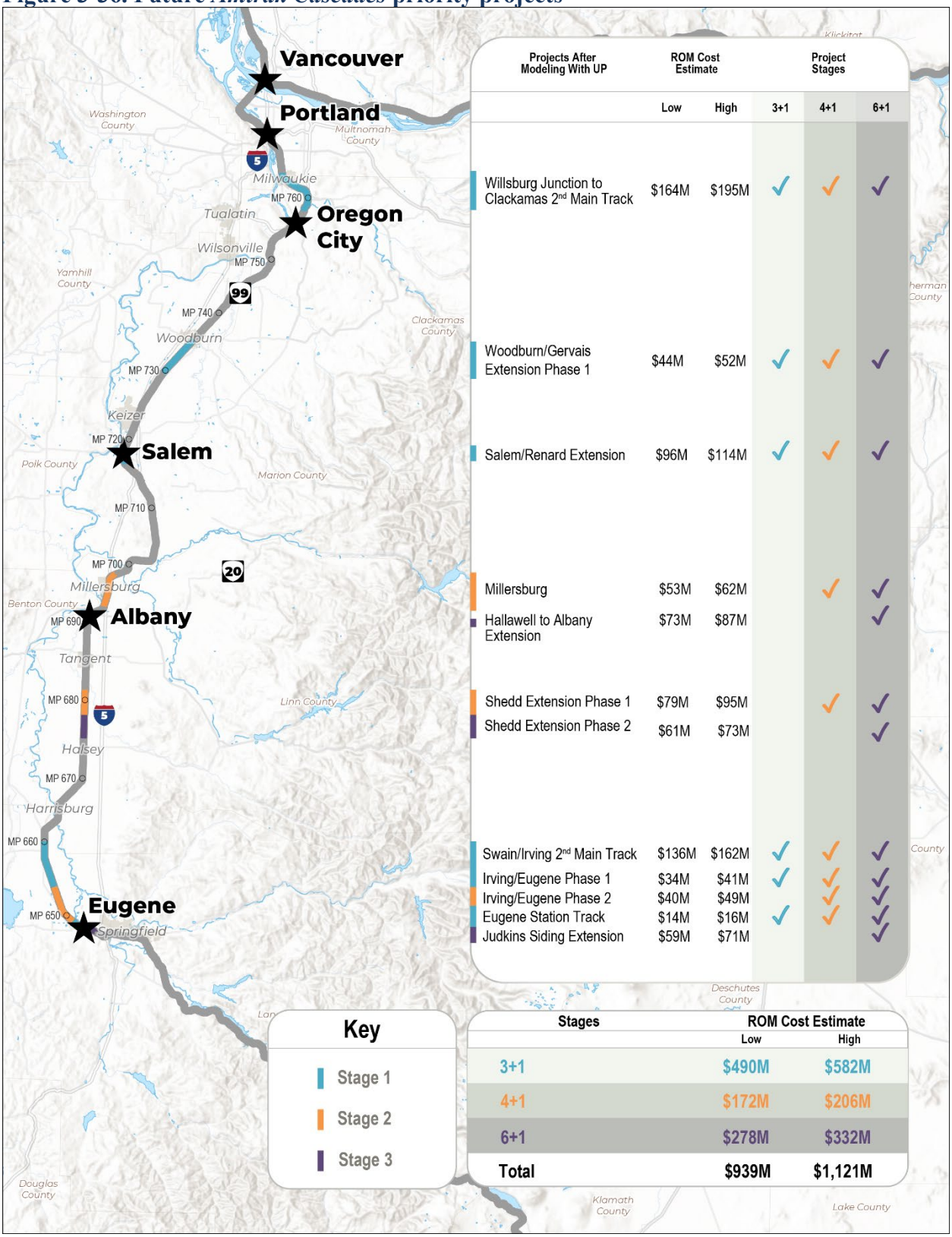
[76] Milepost sequences change within the Judkins project vicinity, meaning that the difference between beginning and end mileposts does not match the actual overall length of the project.

Figure 3-36. Future *Amtrak Cascades* priority projects



Projects After Modeling With UP	ROM Cost Estimate Low	ROM Cost Estimate High	Project Stages 3+1	Project Stages 4+1	Project Stages 6+1
Willsburg Junction to Clackamas 2nd Main Track	$164M	$195M	✓	✓	✓
Woodburn/Gervais Extension Phase 1	$44M	$52M	✓	✓	✓
Salem/Renard Extension	$96M	$114M	✓	✓	✓
Millersburg	$53M	$62M		✓	✓
Hallawell to Albany Extension	$73M	$87M			✓
Shedd Extension Phase 1	$79M	$95M		✓	✓
Shedd Extension Phase 2	$61M	$73M			✓
Swain/Irving 2nd Main Track	$136M	$162M	✓	✓	✓
Irving/Eugene Phase 1	$34M	$41M	✓	✓	✓
Irving/Eugene Phase 2	$40M	$49M		✓	✓
Eugene Station Track	$14M	$16M	✓	✓	✓
Judkins Siding Extension	$59M	$71M			✓

Stages	ROM Cost Estimate Low	ROM Cost Estimate High
3+1	$490M	$582M
4+1	$172M	$206M
6+1	$278M	$332M
Total	$939M	$1,121M

3.3.4 Cascadia high-speed rail

Since 2017, the Washington State Department of Transportation, in partnership with ODOT, Metro, and the British Columbia Ministry of Infrastructure and Transportation as jurisdictional partners, along with private-sector stakeholders, has explored how high-speed rail could connect the Cascadia region. This initiative aims to enhance economic competitiveness and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and is referred to as the Cascadia High Speed Rail project (**Figure** 3-37).

Initial studies identified the metropolitan areas of Vancouver, British Columbia, Seattle, WA, and Portland, Oregon, as the primary anchors of the Cascadia corridor. As the project advances into the development phase, planning efforts may consider additional connections to address transportation needs in Oregon, British Columbia, and eastern Washington.[77]

In December 2024, the Washington State Department of Transportation received a grant award through the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program.[78] The grant supports advancement of the project from Step 1 (Project Planning) into Step 2 (Project Development) based on submission of a scope, schedule, and budget needed for the next phase, including development of a comprehensive service development plan. This funding enables Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia to continue high-speed rail as a long-term strategy to better connect the Cascadia region.

To date, ODOT has worked closely with the Washington State Department of Transportation and the jurisdictional partners to complete the requirements of the Step 1 Corridor Identification and Development process. As the project enters Step 2, the partners will complete a Federal Railroad Administration-approved service development plan for project development.

A well-connected transportation network that includes improved intercity passenger rail service between Eugene and Portland, along with new high-speed rail service between Portland and Seattle/Vancouver, British Columbia, could provide a cost-effective backbone of passenger rail options to Oregon. Improvements envisioned in the Cascadia high-speed rail corridor would offer an energy-efficient travel alternative, reducing congestion and harmful emissions along the I-5 corridor and between major airports throughout the identified corridor. The Cascadia high-speed rail project aligns with Oregon's land use laws that promote reduced reliance on the automobile and supports state policies—including the updated Oregon Transportation Plan—that advance safety, equity, and climate action through a balanced, integrated transportation system offering modal choices for moving people and goods.

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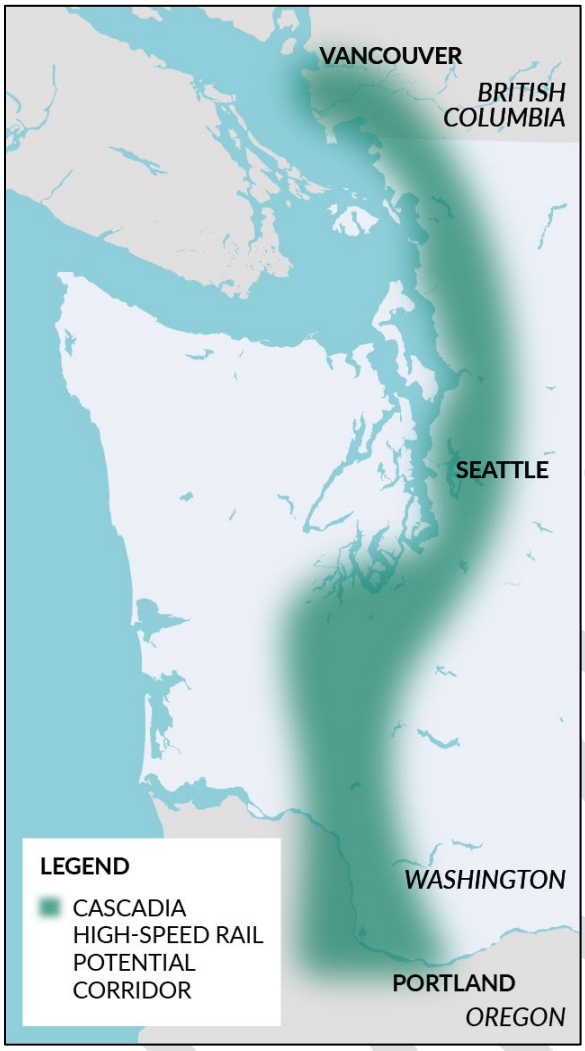
[77] Washington State Department of Transportation, Cascadia Ultra High-Speed Ground Transportation – Framework for the Future, December 2020.
[78] Federal Railroad Administration, Corridor Identification and Development Program, December 2022.

Figure 3-37. Cascadia high-speed rail potential corridor



3.3.5 Long-distance passenger rail

3.3.5.1 Amtrak Empire Builder and Coast Starlight

Although no formal ridership forecasts have been developed specifically for Amtrak's *Empire Builder* and *Coast Starlight*, Amtrak's published assumptions for long-distance train services generally anticipate annual growth of approximately 1 percent to 2 percent, assuming no substantive changes to schedules, equipment, service frequency, or marketing.

Challenges to Improving Amtrak *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder* Services

On-time performance

In fiscal year 2025, just over 53 percent of Amtrak long-distance passengers arrived at their destination within 15 minutes of the published scheduled arrival time.[79] As highlighted in

[79]https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/passenger-rail/amtrak/intercity-passenger-rail-service-quality-and .

Chapter 2, persistent delays on both the *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder* routes have reduced reliability for passengers and increased operating costs. These service challenges need to be addressed when implementing potential new long-distance services. The proposed improvements to Amtrak Cascades services in the Willamette Valley as detailed in **Table 3-6** should improve the *Coast Starlight* on-time performance.

Long-distance fleet replacement

As noted in the Federal Railroad Administration's *Long-Distance Service Study*, Amtrak calls for a consistent, sustainable annual fleet replacement plan to modernize its national intercity passenger equipment. Although the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 provided funding for equipment replacement, the existing fleet of long-distance Superliner passenger cars is insufficient to support a significant expansion of service.[80] After beginning the process of replacing its long-distance fleet with a new blended fleet of single- and double-level railcars, Amtrak has realigned its strategy to focus on a universal standard fleet of single-level railcars.[81] Additional funding, staffing, and vehicles would be required to operate and maintain an expanded network. Amtrak has begun taking delivery of new locomotives for long-distance trains, which is expected to improve the reliability of the *Coast Starlight* and *Empire Builder*.

However, at present the average age of the Bi-Level "Superliner" fleet that equips both trains is already in excess of 40 years, and a timeline for replacement has not been firmly established. This shortfall has already compromised equipment availability and ridership as on average the consist sizes of these trains have shrunk, and with it available revenue space. If allowed to persist, equipment availability could lead to an existential threat to these essential services.

Amenities

Regular reviews of station facilities help ensure that stations meet current customer needs, including facility condition, amenities (such as Wi-Fi), vehicle and bicycle parking, bicycle-share and car-sharing areas (where feasible), Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, and connections to transit and intercity bus services. Currently, Cascades POINT Thruway buses have strong intermodal facilities at Portland Union Station, and the Salem, Eugene, and Albany stations.

3.3.5.2 Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study

The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act directed the Federal Railroad Administration to conduct the *Long-Distance Service Study* to evaluate the restoration of daily passenger rail service along discontinued Amtrak long-distance routes, as well as on existing long-distance routes that operate less than daily.[82] The legislation also authorizes the Federal Railroad Administration to evaluate potential new long-distance routes, with particular attention to routes that were in service as of April 1971 but discontinued.

[80] https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/planning/systems-planning/amtrak-daily-long-distance-service-study.

[81] https://media.amtrak.com/2026/04/amtrak-takes-big-step-towards-new-long-distance-trains/

[82] FRA Amtrak Daily Long Distance Service Study https://railroads.dot.gov/rail-network-development/planning/systems-planning/amtrak-daily-long-distance-service-study.

The *Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study Final Report* identifies preferred route options for restoring, enhancing, or expanding long-distance routes to daily service and establishes a foundation for further planning of potential future long-distance passenger rail services.[83] These preferred route options reflect current travel demand and identify opportunities to increase passenger rail access to rural and transportation-disadvantaged communities, enhance connectivity with existing and future passenger rail services, consider the impacts of previously discontinued long-distance service, and incorporate stakeholder input.

Pertinent to Oregon, the former Amtrak *Pioneer* and *North Coast Hiawatha* routes are identified as part of a future expanded network, as shown in **Figure 3-38** and discussed subsequently in this section.

The final report also identifies significant challenges with implementing the preferred route options, including—but not limited to—funding and governance of Amtrak long-distance services. Additional information is available in the *Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study Final Report*.

Figure 3-38 Federal Railroad Administration Long Distance Service Study preferred routes

[83] FRA Long Distance Study Final Report, 2025 https://railroads.dot.gov/sites/fra.dot.gov/files/2025-09/Amtrak-Daily-Long-Distance-Service-Study_Final-Report_2025.pdf.

3.3.5.3 Big Sky North Coast Corridor

The Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority of the State of Montana is advancing preliminary planning for the Big Sky North Coast Corridor through the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program, which formally accepted the corridor into the program in 2023 and will result in a service development plan for the corridor in subsequent steps. This corridor concept envisions restoring long-distance passenger rail service from the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest, with potential routing that traverses the Tri-Cities region of Pasco, Richland, and Kennewick, Washington as it continues westward toward Portland along existing rail rights-of-way and through the Columbia River Gorge. The exact alignment, stations, and service pattern, including whether the route follows the Columbia River Gorge to Portland or uses alternative western approaches, are not yet determined. All options remain under consideration and will be rigorously analyzed during Step 2 of the Corridor Identification and Development process in the Route Options Analysis portion of the service development plan. This multistate Big Sky North Coast Corridor effort engages stakeholders from Oregon, Washington, and beyond, aligning with regional goals for enhanced intercity connectivity and contributing to broader Pacific Northwest rail planning efforts (**Figure 3-39)**.

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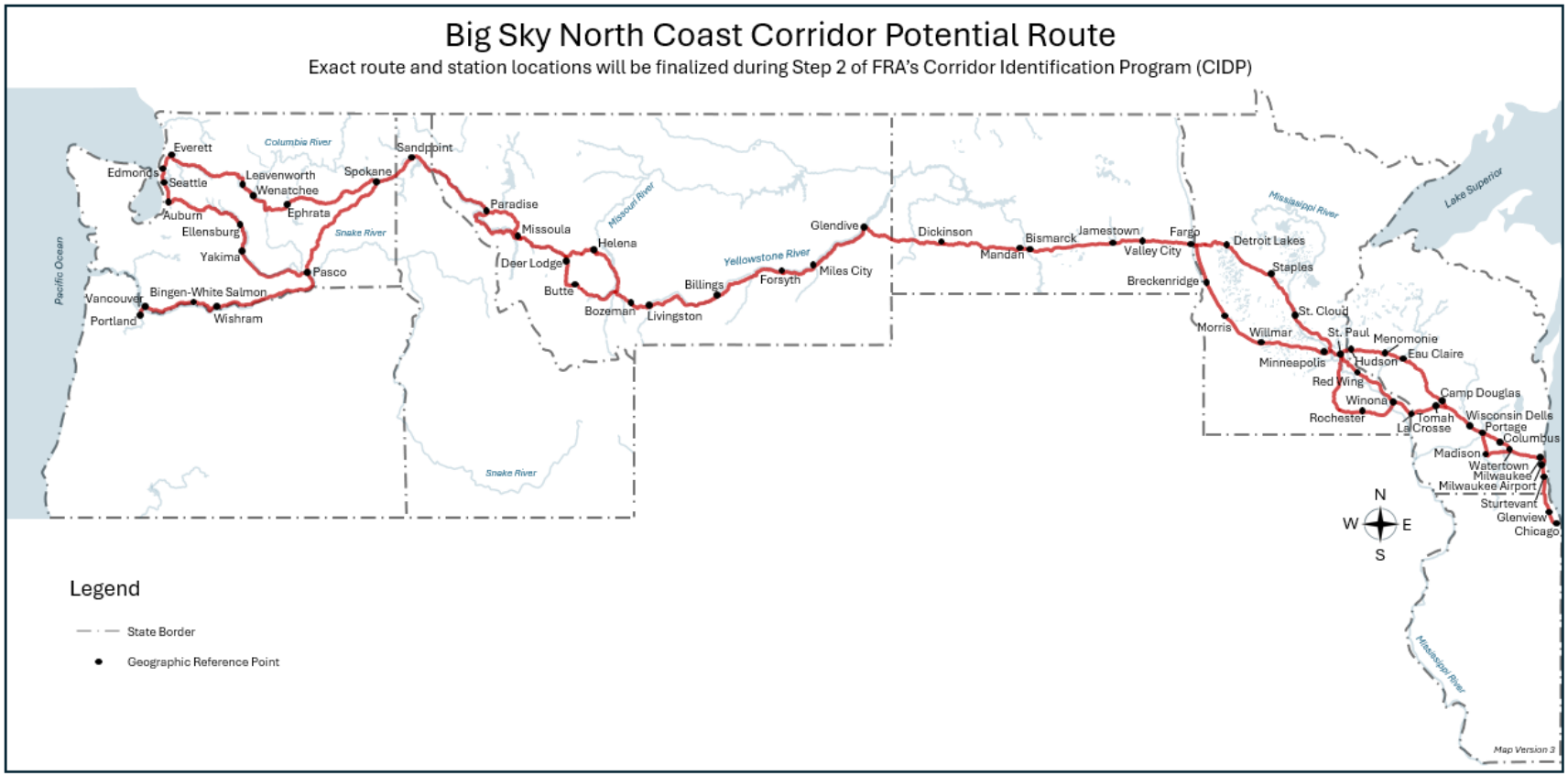
Figure 3-39. Big Sky North Coast Corridor Map with proposed routing options



3.3.5.4 Westside Express Service Commuter Rail

Commuter rail primarily serves the travel needs of specific regions and metropolitan areas, and local transit agencies lead the evaluation and planning for commuter rail in Oregon. Commuter rail is an essential transit service that is experiencing a national push, and as the industry is adjusting from COVID-19, there is a focus on a more regional model that meets the evolving passenger needs.

Oregon's only commuter rail service, the Westside Express Service, has served the Portland metropolitan area since February 2009 (see the system description in Chapter 2). As mentioned above, many commuter rail systems are exploring options to expand and improve service, including:

- Expanding service hours beyond traditional commuting hours.
- Offering free fares or flexible passes for specific passenger groups, such as youth.
- Adding new stations and shuttle bus connections to reach destinations beyond the rail line, including sports arenas or airports.
- Using passenger feedback to strategically adapt and expand service based on community needs.

For many years, the potential for extending the Westside Express Service south to Salem has been explored. Doing so would change the utility of the service by allowing it to provide a regionwide span connecting the Portland and Salem metropolitan areas rather than simply providing a service in the western suburbs of Portland. However, currently there are no planned studies or identified funding to do so.

3.3.6 Other potential rail and connecting service

3.3.6.1 Interregional travel markets

Beyond existing passenger services, additional markets may merit service in the future. Potential future rail corridors were identified through a screening process based on population, inter-market travel demand, and feasibility in terms of existing rail infrastructure. Some corridors have been studied previously, while others are new to this evaluation. Development of new rail passenger services will require a detailed business case and feasibility study that evaluates ridership, technical feasibility, implementation, capital costs, and ongoing operating costs, and will need to incorporate guidance from the policy and strategy elements of this Rail Plan.

Interregional corridors, which range from 50 miles to 300 miles, are where intercity passenger rail has historically proven to be a competitive alternative to automobile travel. Long-distance corridors can also provide economic, mobility, and accessibility benefits to travelers.

Oregon's largest single interregional travel market is between Washington State (Puget Sound) and the Portland area, representing 29.0 percent of trips. Within Oregon, more than three-quarters of the population resides in the Willamette Valley, with travel between the Portland area and the southern Willamette Valley accounting for 27.9 percent of interregional travel. These corridors represent the great majority of estimated interregional travel and are currently served by *Amtrak Cascades* service.

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For markets not currently served by passenger rail, the Oregon Household Activity Survey identified several smaller possible travel markets, as follows:

- **Southern Willamette Valley – Southern Oregon (5.6 percent of interregional travel):** includes Medford, Grants Pass, and Ashland.
- **Portland – North Coast (4.4 percent of interregional travel):** includes Astoria, Seaside, and Tillamook.
- **Southern Willamette Valley – North Coast (3.6 percent of interregional travel).**

3.3.6.2 Potential rail and connecting services corridors

Given the projected trends and performance of rail passenger ridership over the past two decades, it is reasonable to assume continued growth and demand for Amtrak's existing intercity rail services in certain corridors.

Amtrak's former Pioneer Route

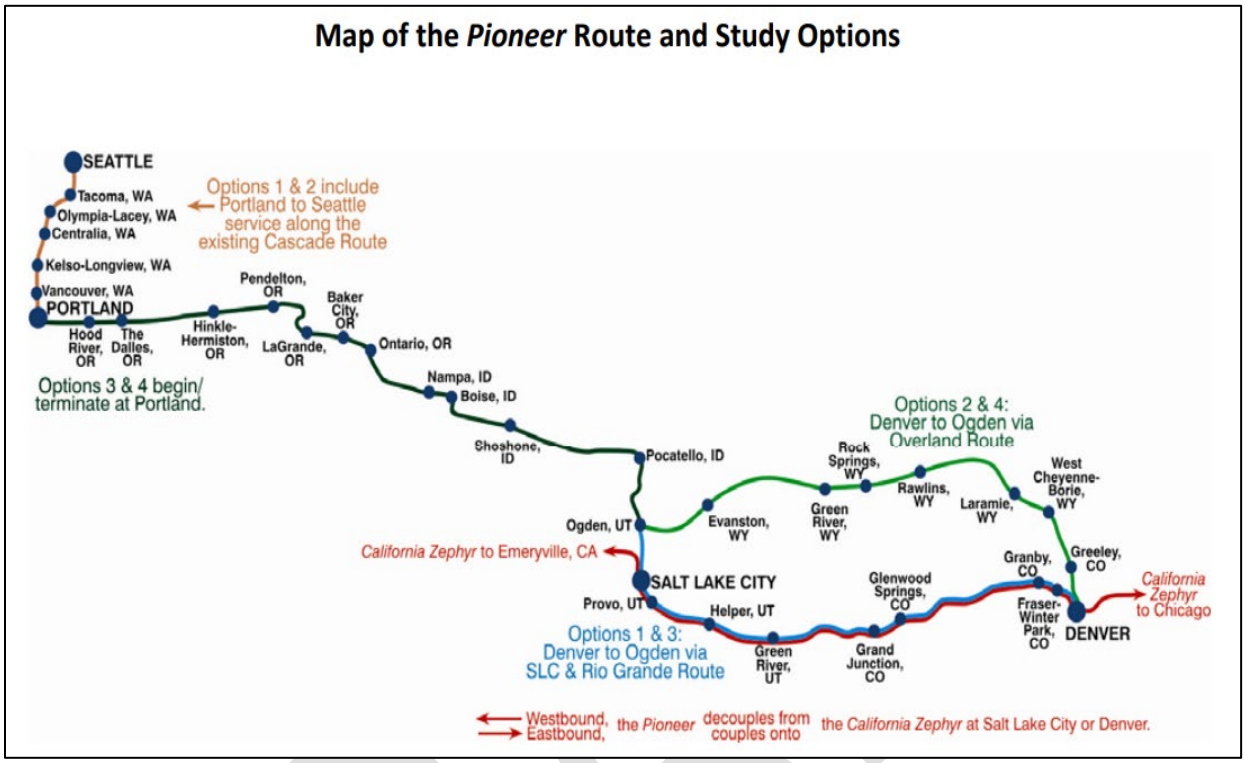
From 1977 to 1997, Amtrak operated the long-distance *Pioneer* service, which extended from Chicago to Seattle via Salt Lake City and Portland. This service was also included in the *Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study Final Report* (**Figure 3-40.**). The City of Boise, Idaho has shown some interest in the past several years in reinstating the route, and has recently received a grant to perform a study.[84]

The Portland–Salt Lake City segment of the *Pioneer* route ran over Union Pacific Railroad tracks between Portland and the Idaho state line, roughly parallel to I-82. Though Oregon communities along the Columbia River currently can access rail passenger service via Amtrak's *Empire Builder* (which operates over BNSF Railway tracks on the north bank of the Columbia River in Washington state), reinstating the *Pioneer* route would:

- Provide direct access to communities in eastern Oregon to the national passenger rail network.
- Reconnect Portland with major mountain west cities, including Boise, Salt Lake City, and Denver.

[84] Boise Receives $500,000 Grant to Study Restoration of Passenger Rail, City of Boise, June 24, 2026 https://www.cityofboise.org/news/general/2026/june/boise-receives-500k-grant-to-study-passenger-rail/

Figure 3-40. Amtrak's *Pioneer* Route



Source: https://transit509.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/amtrak_pioneerservicestudy.pdf.

3.3.6.3 Connections for intercity and regional travel

Portland to Oregon Coast

Current passenger rail connections to the Oregon coast are made by Northwest POINT intercity bus services linking Portland with Astoria via Cannon Beach and Seaside, as well as Tillamook Transit's Coastliner service, as depicted in **Figure 3-41.** Funded through ODOT's Public Transportation Office, the Coastliner service provides scheduled motorcoach connections for coastal communities in northwest Oregon to *Amtrak Cascades* passenger rail and POINT services in Portland at Union Station.[85]

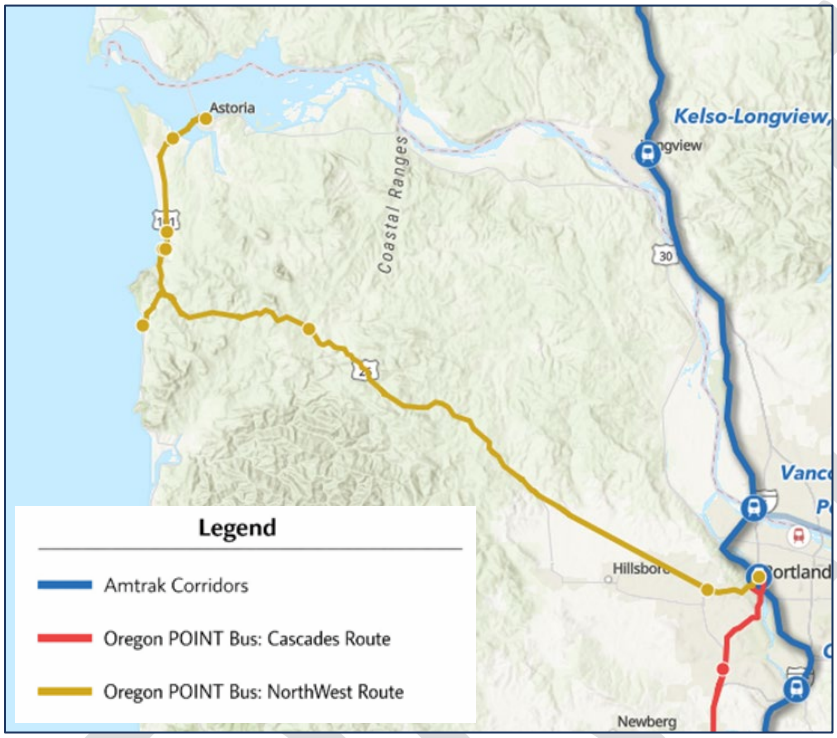
The Northwest Connector network integrates transit in Benton, Columbia, and Tillamook counties, as well as Sunset Empire Transit District, providing coordinated schedules and fare structures for regional connectivity. The Northwest Connector also provides access to destinations including Astoria, Seaside, Cannon Beach, Manzanita, Rockaway Beach, and Tillamook. While passengers must transfer between providers, this service has delivered important regional access between the Portland metropolitan region and northwest coastal communities and tourist destinations.[86]

As *Amtrak Cascades* passenger rail services become more frequent in the future, expanding intermodal connecting services to *Amtrak Cascades* should be implemented. Working with the

[85] https://www.oregon-point.com/routes/northwest.
[86] https://nwconnector.org/.

Washington State Department of Transportation, additional connecting routes should be considered that would link coastal communities with *Amtrak Cascades* service at the Kelso/Longview, WA station. This connection would substantially reduce travel times for riders traveling to or from Tacoma, Seattle, and Vancouver, British Columbia, to vacation destinations on the Oregon coast and could open a substantial untapped tourism market that today relies almost exclusively on private vehicles for access.

Figure 3-41. Portland to Oregon Coast connecting services[87]



Eugene to Ashland Corridor

The *Eugene–Ashland Intercity Passenger Rail Assessment*, which was published April 2010, evaluated the feasibility of providing passenger rail service along this route. It concluded that there would be limited ridership (due to slow travel times) and high capital costs to rebuild the line for passenger service, as well as significant operating costs. However, there are options to provide intercity transportation connections to the region.

After eliminating service on the Eugene-Ashland corridor in 2022, Pacific Crest Bus Lines has recently begun offering intercity bus service between the two cities again, with a single daily direct roundtrip operating between the Eugene train station and Medford's Front Street Station. This service, with a one-way schedule of roughly 3.5 hours, provides a convenient connection from southbound Amtrak bus 5541, but does not provide a convenient connection to a northbound train or bus. Future improvements to the service could focus on increasing service frequency and integrating the schedule of Eugene to Ashland intercity bus service with connecting intercity passenger rail and bus services in Eugene.

[87] Oregon State Rail Plan Online GIS Map

3.4 Passenger and freight rail system needs

3.4.1 Capacity analysis summary

Oregon's rail network faces varied capacity challenges across the state's different railroads. Among the infrastructure needs discussed in Section **3.2.6.2**, capacity constraints for Class I freight railroads tend to be related to issues which limit the fluid movement of trains, such as congestion in terminal areas or sidings limiting the lengths of trains which can use them. Most projects in the Rail Needs Inventory located on tracks operated by Class I railroads BNSF Railway and Union Pacific Railroad are related to yard fluidity improvements, such as installation of power switches, extension of yard leads and sidings to reduce interference between switching and main line train movements, and with grade crossings in terminal areas such as the grade separations identified in Milwaukie.

Passenger rail capacity is most limited by the need for locations for passenger trains to meet and pass freight trains. This is directly related to the terminal and siding constraints experienced by Class I railroads; thus, addressing these issues can create mutual capacity benefits between passenger and freight rail services. As was further discussed in Section **3.2.6.2**, Class III short line capacity tends to be constrained by the condition of the infrastructure over which the railroad operates. Poor quality track and structures such as bridges and tunnels can pose problems for Class III railroads, as the high costs to maintain these assets in already poor condition can result in further deferral of maintenance in favor of speed and weight restrictions. These are exemplified in the Rail Needs Inventory[88] by the over 20 projects (at time of writing) related to rail and turnout replacement and nine projects related to bridge rehabilitation/modernization located on short line railroads.

3.4.2 Freight and passenger capacity needs

Specifically identified capacity needs on Oregon's Class I rail network tend to overlap with those of the state's passenger rail services in the Willamette Valley. If Union Pacific Railroad's main-line between Eugene and Portland is a primary artery for generation and collection of freight rail traffic, the greater Portland terminal area is the beating heart of Oregon's rail network.

3.4.2.1 Service Development Plan identified projects

Class I system

As previously discussed in section 3.3.3, an extensive capacity modeling process as part of Oregon's Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan development has taken place involving ODOT, Amtrak, Union Pacific Railroad, and the Federal Railroad Administration. This capacity modeling developed a suite of capital investments which would enable the introduction of up to six daily roundtrips of the Amtrak Cascades service between Eugene and Portland. A prioritized inventory of the projects which resulted from that process is listed in **Table 3-6**.

The primary capacity concern identified through this process was regarding conflicts between passenger trains and local freight trains. The participation of the host railroad allowed the process to focus on the specific operational challenges of the corridor, rather than making broad

[88] See Appendix 3

assumptions about freight operations. Union Pacific Railroad's participation in the process made it clear that the primary need in the corridor was not siding extensions and extensive sections of double track, but rather expansion of capacity in the areas immediately adjacent to yards and the creation of opportunities for local freight trains to serve industries without occupying the main track. This input was entirely validated by the RailState Analysis in Appendix A, where clear observations were captured to the effect of Union Pacific Railroad's line through the Willamette Valley acting as a major generator of local Oregon rail traffic. The resulting projects create significant mutual benefits between passenger and freight rail and will lay the groundwork for the expansion of passenger and freight rail traffic in the Willamette Valley corridor. Additionally, the identified projects focused on total capacity and will allow the aforementioned passenger rail frequencies agnostic of any specific schedule, meaning that with these projects enacted, the service could be expanded to whichever schedule is most ideal for the corridor.

Outside of the Portland to Eugene corridor, significant capacity issues do not immediately present themselves. Union Pacific's Overland Route main line to Omaha and Chicago has seen periodic investments in siding extensions and double track over the past two decades, and the BNSF Railway's Inside Gateway corridor carries a traffic load which is likely below that which would begin to stress the corridor's capacity.

Class III system

Class III railroads play a vital role in developing small customer "carload" rail traffic and assembling cuts of cars that are efficient for Class I and III railroads to interchange. As seen in **Figure 3-4**, the overall national trend for freight, rail traffic is down. The recession and global pandemic over the period of this analysis resulted in significant traffic losses the network has yet to recover from. The vitality of Class III railroads is key to this recovery.

As the projects outlined in the Service Development Plan for the Oregon section of the Amtrak Cascades service are built out, new capacity on the Portland to Eugene corridor will be realized. This new capacity will allow for increased traffic to be fed to the corridor from interchanges with Class III railroads, if those railroads are able to generate new traffic to move to and from the Class I system. In order to maximize the benefits of capacity expansion of Class I railroads, both within and outside the Portland to Eugene corridor, investment in Class III railroad infrastructure will strengthen the likelihood of increased rail traffic. From basic state of good repair investments, such as replacing rail and ties, to more intensive investments like bridge rebuild programs, modernization of infrastructure on Class III railroads may realize secondary and tertiary benefits of the investments made to the Amtrak Cascades corridor.

3.4.2.2 Other potential capacity constraints

The primary capacity needs of Oregon's rail network are related to the Portland to Eugene corridor and the wellbeing of the state's Class III railroads. However, in the future, some sections of the state's network may become constrained if rail traffic were to experience growth. Notably, the section of main line between Chemult and Klamath Falls owned by Union Pacific Railroad is also shared with BNSF Railway and carries the combined traffic of these railroads to California. The corridor has frequent sidings, but these sidings are limited by their short length. Train lengths have increased since these sidings were constructed or last extended, and as a result, it is one of only two corridors in which both the estimated 90th and 75th percentile train lengths are

greater than the estimated median siding clear length.[89] Should rail traffic grow, this limitation will affect trains to and from California.

3.4.3 At-grade crossings related to capacity needs

As further discussed in Appendix A, a significant number of at-grade crossings on Oregon's Class I rail network are within the 90th percentile observed train length of yard limits. The crossings listed in **Table 3-7** all fall within that distance of yards in the Salem and Portland areas, and are all also identified in the Rail Needs Inventory as potential crossings for improvement, grade separation, or closure.

Table 3-7. At-grade crossings identified for improvement in the Rail Needs Inventory within 90th percentile observed train lengths of yards

Crossing ID	Street Name	City
760058E	Southeast McGilchrist Street	Salem
759733U	Southeast 11th Avenue	Portland
759735H	Southeast 12th Avenue	Portland
759730Y	Southeast 8th Avenue	Portland
754559V	Southeast Clay Street	Portland
754542S	Southeast Stark Street	Portland
754550J	Southeast Yamhill Street	Portland
754547B	Southeast Belmont Street	Portland
754543Y	Southeast Washington Street	Portland
754558N	Hawthorne Boulevard	Portland
754554L	Southeast Madison Street	Portland
754553E	Southeast Main Street	Portland
754544F	Southeast Alder Street	Portland
754551R	Southeast Taylor Street	Portland
754545M	Southeast Morrison Street	Portland
754552X	Southeast Salmon Street	Portland
759756B	Southeast Harrison Street	Milwaukie

3.4.4 ODOT Section 130 projects.

Table 3-8 includes the status of all Section 130 highway-rail grade crossing safety projects list provided by ODOT Commerce and Compliance Division rail safety and regulatory branch that are in the 2024-2027 State Transportation Improvement Program. Current status summary: 12 active projects, 3 completed projects, and 6 cancelled projects or projects with cancellation in progress.

[89] See Appendix 1 section 4.3.5 for more detail.

Table 3-8. Active Section 130 highway-rail projects

Key No.	Project name in STIP financial plan database	City	County	Notes
K20252	US101: urban upgrade (Garibaldi)	Garibaldi	Tillamook	3rd St./7th St.
K21104	Salem Industrial Drive northeast rail crossing	Salem	Marion	Was going to be cancelled, but potentially saved now that additional funding is available.
K21185	Queen Avenue Rail Crossing (Albany)	Albany	Linn	—
K21381	Maxwell Road and Prairie Road (Eugene)	Eugene	Lane	—
K22440	NW 112th Avenue and Portland & Western Railroad rail crossing upgrades	Portland	Multnomah	—
K22617	I-84 Celilo Frontage Rd Rail Crossing	Celilo Village	Wasco	—
K22618	Merrill Pit Road Rail Crossing (Klamath County)	Merrill	Klamath	—
K23045	Pole Line Lane Rail Crossing	Haines	Baker	—
K23046	Echo Pedestrian Railroad Crossing	Echo	Umatilla	Scope change - No longer overcrossing. Will be At-Grade Ped Crossing.
K23291	US30 at SE Maple St Rail Crossing (Scappoose)	Scappoose	Columbia	—
K23293	NW Naito Parkway Rail Crossing	Portland	Multnomah	—
K23396	OR451/US20: Vale Sidewalk and Rail Pedestrian Crossing	Vale	Malheur	—

Completed Section 130 projects

Key No.	Project Name in STIP Financial Plan Database	City	County	Notes
K20185	OR99: I-5 to Scenic Ave	Central Point	Jackson	Completed. Closing out still in progress.
K21459	US30: Millard and Bennett Roads	St. Helens	Columbia	Completed
K22607	Revere Avenue Rail Crossing	Bend	Deschutes	Completed. Planning Phase only.

Cancelled / cancellation in progress Section 130 projects

Key No.	Project Name in STIP Financial Plan Database	City	County	Notes
K21238	Mill Street SE rail crossing	Salem	Marion	Cancelled
K22616	Reed Rd Rail Crossing	La Pine	Deschutes	Cancellation in progress
K22946	Beta Drive SW Rail Crossing	Albany	Linn	Cancellation in progress
K22949	Ehlen Rd NE Rail Crossing	Aurora	Marion	Cancelled. Closing out still in progress.
K22950	Graham Road Rail Crossing	Prescott	Columbia	Cancelled
K23090	US30B: (NE Lombard St) NE Lombard Pl - NE 11th Ave	Portland	Multnomah	Cancelled. Closing out still in progress.

Source: ODOT Commerce and Compliance Division rail safety & regulatory branch 2025

3.4.5 Conclusion

Rail is not losing relevance but is also not dramatically increasing its share of the freight market. Trucks currently dominate freight movement in Oregon, accounting for the vast majority of both originating and terminating traffic, while rail represents a relatively small share. By 2045, rail tonnage is forecast to grow significantly, yet its overall mode share is expected to increase only marginally. This indicates that rail is growing in absolute terms but largely maintaining its relative position within the broader freight system.

Passenger rail remains a small percentage of overall travel share; however, Amtrak Cascades services in Oregon have experienced a stratospheric rise to hit all-time records, indicating latent demand for service.

There are tools the public sector can use to help bolster growth. Rail supports the goals of the Oregon Transportation Plan by moving freight and passengers in a way that is significantly safer on average per ton- or passenger-mile, produces fewer pollutants, reduces demand for road capacity, enhances the state's economic vitality, and reduces road maintenance costs. Consistent investment in rail infrastructure will advance the goals of the Oregon Transportation Plan in aiding freight and passengers mode shift onto the railroads. The projects necessary to enable greater rail mode share for passenger and freight transportation are known and discrete, whether they are from the Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan (see **Figure 3-36**) or identified by other stakeholders through the Rail Needs Inventory (Appendix C).

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Chapter 4. Rail Service and Implementation Program

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 4 establishes the "action plan" component of this State Rail Plan and presents key drivers for how Oregon will make investments in the future. This includes the Oregon State Rail Plan vision statement and goals, the investment decision-making framework, policies and strategies, and indication of project types that the state should invest in, given adequate funding in the future. Supporting information for this chapter can be found in the Investment Program Technical Memorandum.

4.2 Oregon State Rail Plan vision and goals

The rail system in Oregon is predominantly owned by private railroads, and freight and passenger rail services are critical components of the state's multimodal transportation network. Oregon recognizes the unique opportunities public- and private-sector partnership presents and has a vested interest in proactive planning for the rail system's future so that Oregon's residents and businesses can capitalize on the many benefits freight and passenger rail services provide:

- The rail system is a significant conduit for economic and job activity. The 2023 Oregon Freight Plan estimates that 31 percent of Oregon's economy depends on industries that rely on the transportation of goods. Efficient and accessible intercity passenger rail connects job markets, recreation and tourism centers throughout the state to support local economies.
- The rail system improves connections for people and goods. Passenger and freight rail systems in Oregon connect people and goods within the state, across the United States and to Canada. The freight rail system connects to ports in Oregon which import and export goods between international markets.
- The rail system provides mode choice and relieves congestion. Both freight and passenger rail systems provide modal options for users. By offering travel options, transportation costs of residents and businesses are lowered. Likewise, removing vehicles from the road brings positive impacts including congestion mitigation, reduced safety concerns and decreased wear and tear on other parts of the state's roadway system.
- Use of rail contributes positively to the environment and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. In general, rail is a more efficient mode in terms of fuel consumption and reduced climate impacts, as compared to passenger vehicles and trucks. When coordinated, rail enhances community quality of life. Passenger and commuter rail supports the development of livable communities, spurs economic opportunities at station locations. Preservation of rail corridors ensures that economic development opportunities can be realized in the future.

In order to realize the full spectrum of benefits a transportation system that integrates passenger and freight rail provides, the state of Oregon will take an active role and partner with regional and local governments and private rail companies to proactively plan and explore investments to make the rail system in Oregon better by working together.

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4.2.1 Oregon State Rail Plan vision statement

The Oregon State Rail Plan vision statement is a forward-looking statement that will shape the future of the rail system and ensure the beneficial outcomes of rail are realized. The vision is carried out through the State Rail Plan's goals, policies, strategies and implementation framework.

Oregon will have a safe, efficient, and commercially viable rail system that serves its businesses, travelers and communities through private resources leveraged, as needed, by strategic public investments.

4.2.2 Oregon State Rail Plan goals

As highlighted in Chapter 1, there are seven State Rail Plan goals. Supporting goal text, policies and strategies are articulated later in this chapter. The order in which the goals are presented in this State Rail Plan does not imply any priority among the goals as they are all critically important to meet the vision. The use of goal numbers is a convenient way to refer to each individual goal and is not a priority numbering system. The goals for the Oregon State Rail Plan include:

Goal 1 – Partnership, Collaboration and Communication

Partner, collaborate and communicate with rail system operators and other stakeholders to maximize benefits, align interests, remove barriers and bring innovative solutions to the rail system; and foster public understanding of rail's importance.

Goal 2 – Connected System

Promote, preserve and enhance an efficient rail system that is accessible for all Oregonians and is integrated with Oregon's overall multimodal transportation system.

Goal 3 - System Stewardship

Enhance transportation system reliability, expand capacity, frequency and travel times through investments that preserve and improve freight and passenger rail assets and infrastructure.

Goal 4 - Funding, Finance and Investment Principles

Establish funding that meets the critical needs of the rail system in Oregon and achieves the objectives of this State Rail Plan.

Goal 5 - System Safety

Plan, construct, operate, maintain and coordinate the rail system in Oregon with safety and security for all users, rail workers, and communities as a top priority.

Goal 6 - Sustainability and Community Vitality

Increase use and investment in freight and passenger rail systems to meet Oregon's goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improve Oregon's natural environment and support thriving communities.

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Goal 7 - Economic Development

Increase opportunity and investment in freight and passenger rail assets to grow Oregon's economy.

4.3 Rail investment decision-making framework

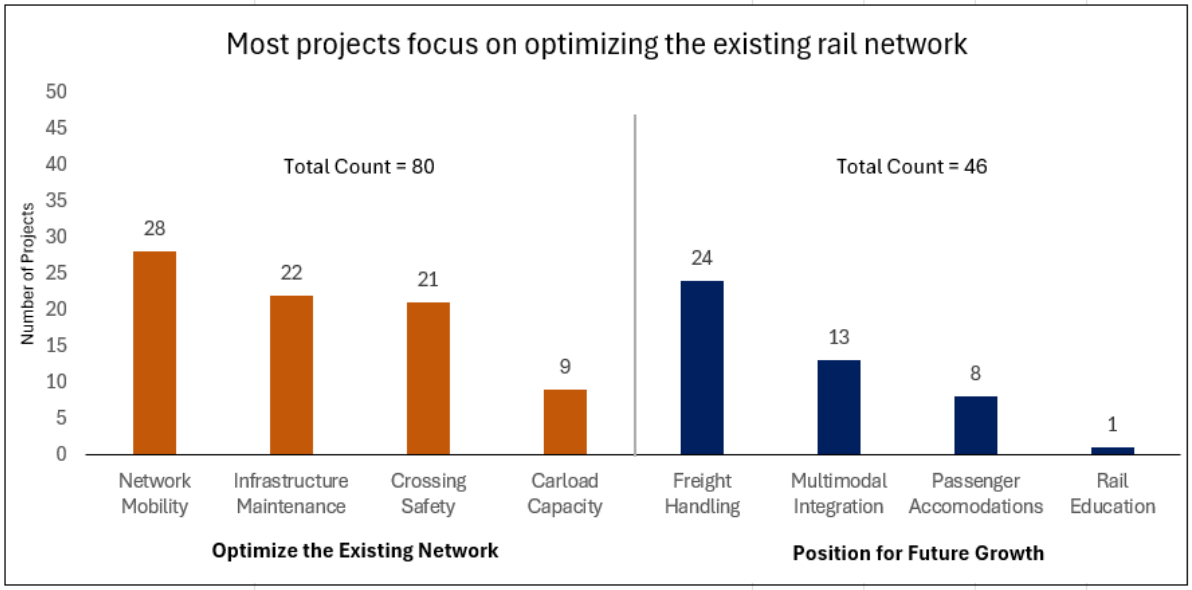
Oregon's rail investments are guided by a structured decision-making framework aligned with the State Rail Plan's vision and goals. This section describes this framework and how it is used to identify projects that improve Oregon's freight and passenger rail network. Through continued collaboration, ODOT is positioned to identify projects that are well aligned with state priorities and available funding opportunities.

4.3.1 Rail needs inventory

Oregon's rail needs inventory is a centralized repository of potential rail projects across the state, submitted by a range of stakeholders. Public agencies, railroads, ports, consultants, businesses and members of the public may propose projects using the online intake form. Submitted projects are reviewed by the ODOT rail team for completeness, clarity and alignment with rail needs. Inclusion in the rail needs inventory is not automatic; projects are added at ODOT's discretion following the review process.

If accepted, the project is documented in a consistent format within the database, including key information such as project name, location and description. In 2023, the rail needs inventory included 126 potential rail projects, organized into eight project categories. These categories generally fall into two broader themes: (1) optimize the existing network and (2) position for future growth. **Figure 4-1** illustrates this breakdown.

Figure 4-1. Rail needs inventory projects by category



As shown in **Figure 4-1**, most projects in the Rail Needs Inventory fall within the theme of optimizing the existing rail network; however, the second largest category of projects overall (Freight Handling*)* supports the theme of positioning the system for future growth by advancing

freight handling efficiency. The largest share of projects in the Rail Needs Inventory is dedicated to optimizing the existing network by supporting the flow of rail traffic (Network Mobility). **Table 4-1** provides additional details on each category of potential rail projects.

Table 4-1. Project category descriptions

Theme	Category (Outcomes)	Description (Benefits)
Optimize the existing network	**Network mobility** Improve overall network mobility	Reduce bottlenecks and optimize train flow
	Infrastructure maintenance Rehabilitate deteriorating rail infrastructure	Strengthen operational reliability and restore infrastructure integrity
	Crossing safety Enhance rail crossing safety	Minimize train-vehicle and train-pedestrian collisions
	Carload capacity Increase carload carrying capacity	Allow heavier, taller and longer freight loads
Position for future growth	**Freight handling** Advance freight handling efficiency	Reduce loading time and enable additional carloads
	Multimodal integration Advance multimodal system integration	Improve coordination of multimodal mobility at rail touchpoints
	Passenger accommodations Upgrade passenger rail accommodations	Increase seating capacity and improve boarding accessibility
	Rail education Develop rail history education	Preserve knowledge and create learning opportunities

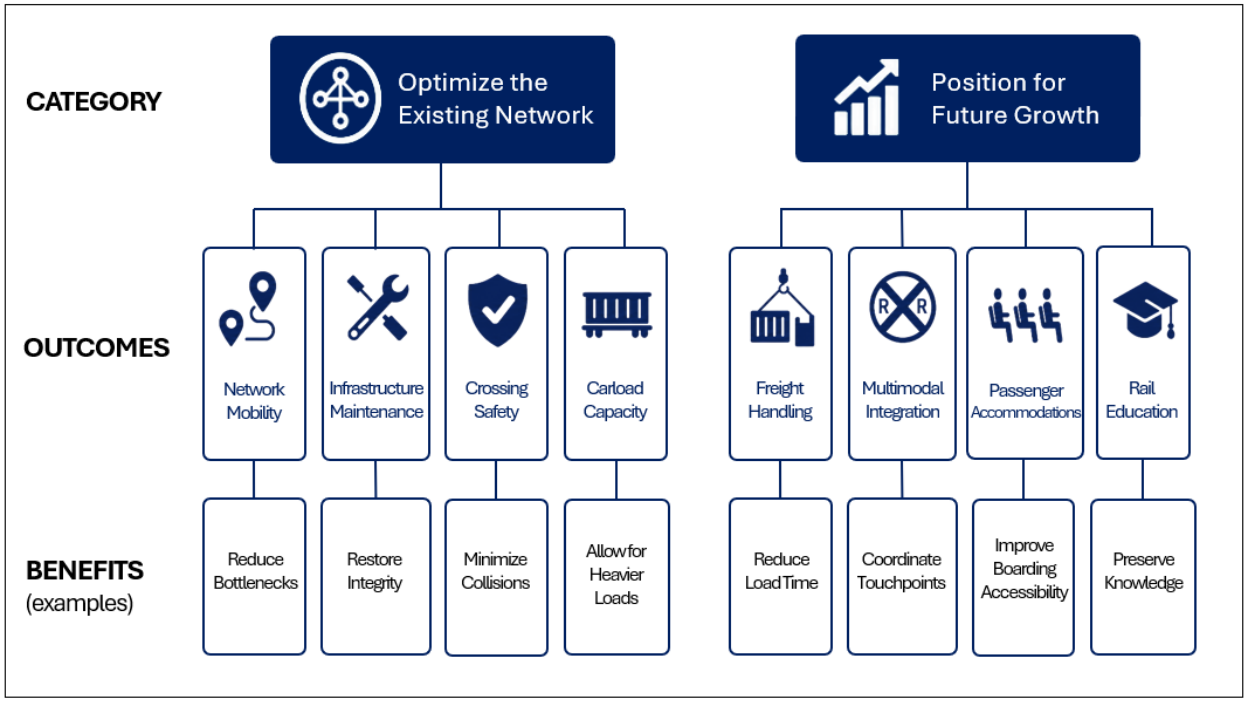
4.3.2 Rail project categorization

The Rail Needs Inventory is categorized using a simple hierarchy that groups projects by three levels: themes (highest level), outcomes (higher level) and benefits (high level). This structure helps organize projects in a consistent way and makes it easier to discern how each project contributes to broader system goals.

As the Rail Needs Inventory evolves, these categories may be refined or amended to ensure incoming projects continue to be grouped appropriately. For example, the "Rail Education" category was created to capture a project that did not fit within any of the existing options.

There are two primary principles for developing the rail project categories. First, projects are grouped based on anticipated benefits rather than project attributes. Second, categories are designed to be mutually exclusive, so that each project can be assigned to only one category. Together, these principles position investment decision-making to align with statewide goals. **Figure 4-2** illustrates the hierarchy for categorization of the Rail Needs Inventory projects.

Figure 4-2. Project categorization hierarchy structure



Grouping projects by outcome rather than by project attributes helps keep the focus on how each project supports funding priorities. This approach also allows early discussions to focus first on evaluating each project's alignment with broader transportation goals, rather than getting bogged down in the complexities of implementation. Bridge-related projects in the Rail Needs Inventory provide a clear example of projects that have similar project attributes but do not achieve the same outcomes. For instance, some bridge improvements enable taller freight trains (double stacking) and fall under the outcome "Increase Carload Carrying Capacity," while others replace aging structures and are categorized as "Rehabilitate Deteriorating Rail Infrastructure." In other situations, bridge projects help restore rail service, which falls under the outcome "Improve Overall Network Mobility." If these projects were grouped solely as "Bridge Structures," much important context would be lost, making it more difficult to evaluate investment decisions alongside funding priorities and state transportation goals.

Mutually exclusive categories are important for ensuring full representation of a project's benefits. For example, some projects in the Rail Needs Inventory focus on reducing train delays, while others focus on improving train communication systems (for example, Centralized Traffic Control). Although these are different types of projects, both improve overall network fluidity by managing bottlenecks. Thus, creating separate categories for "Reduce Train Delays" and "Improve Communication Systems" would be considered redundant because of the category overlap; improved communication systems also reduce train delays (bottlenecks). If grouped separately, the benefit of reducing train delays could be overlooked when evaluating the overall benefits of investing in projects that improve train communication systems. A hierarchical structure of project categorization, on the other hand, ensures these efforts are grouped under a shared outcome while still distinguishing the specific actions involved.

The project categorization supports more strategic investment decision-making by showing clearly how each project contributes to transportation benefits. The following section describes how evaluation criteria are applied to the identified Rail Needs Inventory projects to prioritize investment decisions.

4.3.3 Evaluation factors and criteria

To inform decisions on which rail projects to prioritize for investment, ODOT developed a set of evaluation factors and criteria in 2022. Evaluation factors represent broad categories of project value, while evaluation criteria define the measurable characteristics used to assess performance for each factor.

The Oregon Transportation Plan and Oregon State Rail Plan serve as the state's primary policy frameworks for guiding long-term transportation investment decisions. The Strategic Action Plan[1] outlines ODOT's near-term commitments and actions. Within this framework, evaluation factors and criteria ensure consistency with statewide goals, by considering:

- Consistency with the State Rail Plan's key themes, including mobility, economic vitality, environmental sustainability, community and safety, good stewardship and strong partnerships.
- System performance priorities that are most important to Oregon's shippers, ports, passengers, and communities, including multimodal connectivity.

The evaluation factors and criteria were developed through a collaborative process involving the Oregon Transportation Commission, the Rail Advisory Committee, the technical advisory committee and an internal project team, and included input from stakeholders and consultant partners. The process of developing the evaluation factors and criteria was based on a comprehensive range of relevant planning documents in **Table 4-2**.

Table 4-2. Planning documents used to inform evaluation factors and criteria

Document Name	Description
Oregon Transportation Plan	Oregon's long-range policy framework that guides how all transportation systems are planned and funded across the state.
Oregon State Rail Plan	Statewide planning document that outlines how rail in Oregon is improved and funded to support transportation and economic goals.
ODOT Strategic Action Plan	Short-term plan that outlines ODOT's key priorities, actions, and performance goals.
Statewide Transportation Investment Plan	Oregon's four-year program identifies and funds specific transportation projects across Oregon.
Connect Oregon Multimodal Funding Plan	Guide on how Oregon invests in non-highway transportation to support economic development.
Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan	Outlines how passenger rail service in Oregon can be improved, expanded, and operated over time.

[1] Oregon Department of Transportation, *Strategic Action Plan*, published April 3, 2024, revised April 2025, https://www.oregon.gov/odot/pages/sap.aspx

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Document Name	Description
Oregon Public Transportation Plan	Statewide planning document outlines how public transit in Oregon is planned, funded, and improved.
Oregon Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Action Plan	Outlines how Oregon will improve safety at highway-rail crossings through targeted projects, funding, and coordination.

Using the structured review process, evaluation factors and criteria were selected that enable the state to identify and prioritize the rail projects that best serve stakeholder interests and align with available funding. **Table 4-3** describes the evaluation factors and criteria.

Table 4-3. Investment decision-making framework: evaluation factors and criteria

Factor	Description	Evaluation Criteria
Equity	Consider census areas with high numbers of transportation disadvantaged residents and environmental justice communities	Transportation Disadvantaged Populations Index
		Expanding economic equity
Environment	Consider the physical and built environments that are anticipated because of the project's implementation	Air quality and greenhouse gases
		Natural resources
		Climate and seismic resiliency
		Cultural and historic resources
		Congestion mitigation
Economic	Consider the incremental changes in costs, including local and statewide economic effects, that could occur with the implementation of the project	Shipping costs
		Operating costs
		Regional and local economic impact
Mobility	Consider the improvement that the project will provide to the transportation system, across all modes interacting with the project	Travel time
		Travel reliability
		Capacity improvements
		Multimodal connectivity
Readiness	Consider the project's ability to proceed based on technical documents, owner buy-in/support, permits identified and/or received, regulatory and environmental approvals, known existing or pending funding, political support and identified required approvals	Funding leverage
		Community support status
		Project development status
		Right of way status
Safety	Consider anticipated safety-related improvements and impacts experienced by other transportation users due to project operations	Change in operator and maintenance staff safety
		Change in passenger safety
		Change in road user safety
		Level of stress (active transportation users)

A range of supporting considerations informed the development of the evaluation factors and criteria. These include performance metrics (see Section 3.1, Oregon State Rail Benefits), input from the Area Commissions on Transportation, public-private partnership opportunities and stakeholder perspectives. Key stakeholders consulted included federal and state agencies, passenger and freight rail operators, industry organizations, intercity bus providers, and other transportation partners.

Policy and regulatory guidance also informed the criteria, including applicable requirements from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Railroad Administration and Oregon Administrative Rules. In addition, insights from existing programs and funding mechanisms were incorporated, such as the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, the Connect Oregon Program and federal grant programs. Consideration also was given to the Oregon Transportation Commission strategic direction and the Oregon Passenger Rail project environmental impact statement.

Evaluation criteria are used to assess anticipated public benefits, project risk and project cost using a Likert scale ranging from -2 to +2. A score of +2 indicates a significant positive impact; a score of -2 indicates a significant negative impact; and a score of 0 indicates no expected change.

After scoring each factor, the evaluation applies a dynamic weighting approach to reflect the priorities of a given funding opportunity. For example, the Federal Railroad Administration's Railroad Crossing Elimination Program emphasizes safety and mobility. Therefore, these factors may be weighed more heavily when identifying competitive projects, while still maintaining alignment with statewide priorities. The hierarchical structure of the framework also supports program-specific screening by evaluating only the relevant project categories (e.g., "Crossing Safety" and "Network Mobility" for railroad crossing elimination projects).

To support comparison across diverse project types, the framework translates factor-level scores into overall ratings of "high," "medium," or "low." This approach enables consistent comparison while balancing quantitative and qualitative inputs. Quantitative analysis is applied where data are available, such as assessing public benefits relative to cost, whereas qualitative assessment supports the subjective evaluation of factors such as alignment with statewide goals or identification of potential constraints. This combined approach provides a flexible yet consistent framework for evaluating and prioritizing rail investments across a range of project types and data availability.

4.3.4 Identified rail projects

This section summarizes the freight and passenger rail projects identified using the state's decision-making framework. A key strength of Oregon's rail investment decision-making framework is its flexibility to adapt to evolving stakeholder priorities. Through the State Rail Plan update process, two additional evaluation factors were incorporated into the decision-making framework and used to evaluate freight and rail projects, as follows:

1. **Rail Preservation**: Recent trends in rail line abandonment have increased the importance of maintaining existing infrastructure. This factor recognizes the long-term value of preserving rail corridors by considering the opportunity cost of abandonment, including impacts to system connectivity and future economic potential. Evaluation criteria include:
    - Existing industries served by rail line.

- Potential for future industrial or economic development.
- Connectivity to the broader transportation network.
- Geographic context and service territory.
- Factors influencing operating costs and revenues.
- Regional vision and long-term land use goals.

2. **Passenger Rail**: This factor elevates projects with potential for new or expanded rail service, including enhancements to the Amtrak Cascades corridor between Eugene, Oregon, and Vancouver, Washington and potential new long-distance services. While the Amtrak Cascades service development plan is advancing through the Federal Railroad Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program, additional opportunities may warrant future investment. Evaluation criteria include:
    - Forecasted ridership and revenue.
    - Capital and operating costs.
    - Economic and social benefits.
    - Service alternatives.
    - Alignment with local and regional transportation goals.
    - Availability of external funding sources, such as federal grant programs.

The state of Oregon plans passenger rail improvements over both the near and long term. In the near term, projects focus on critical improvements at Portland Union Station and initial planning for Amtrak Cascades service improvements through the federally administered Corridor Identification and Development Program. Over the longer term, projects include further planning and development to the Amtrak Cascades service, also within the Corridor Identification and Development Program. These investments support continued development of intercity passenger rail service in the corridor and enable growth in freight services. For freight rail, the framework emphasizes preservation of the existing system in both the near term and the long term. This effort includes maintaining critical infrastructure and supporting the continued viability of short-line railroads. Appendix 3 includes all rail projects in the Rail Needs Inventory. **Table 4-4** and **Table 4-5** summarize Oregon's near-term and long-term planned passenger rail capital investments.

Table 4-4. State-identified near-term passenger rail capital investments

Near Term (0-5 years)		
Rail Type	**Identified Project**	**Project Category**
Passenger Rail	Portland Union Station	Passenger Accommodations/Safety
	Willsburg Junction to Clackamas 2nd Track	Network Mobility
	Woodburn/Gervais Siding Extension Phase 1	Network Mobility
	Salem/Renard Extension	Network Mobility
	Swain/Irving 2nd Main Track	Network Mobility
	Irving/Eugene Phase 1	Network Mobility
	Eugene Station Track	Network Mobility

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Table 4-5. State-identified long-term passenger rail capital investments

Long Term (6-20 years)		
Rail Type	**Identified Project**	**Project Category**
Passenger Rail	Millersburg Siding Extension	Network Mobility
	Phase 1 Shedd Siding Extension (North)	Network Mobility
	Phase 2 Irving Siding Right of Way and Utility Work	Network Mobility
	Phase 2 Gervais Siding Extension	Network Mobility
	Albany-Hallawell Siding Extension	Network Mobility
	Phase 2 Shedd Siding Extension (North)	Network Mobility
	Judkins Siding Extension	Network Mobility

4.3.5 Passenger rail project spotlight

Portland Union Station and the Willbridge Crossovers (**Figure 4-2**) are both advanced projects, with completed preliminary engineering and design, funded by the Federal Railroad Administration. Both projects also have obtained environmental clearance under the National Environmental Policy Act. These projects enhance the existing Amtrak Cascades service and the *Coast Starlight* service. Improvements at Portland Union Station also benefit Amtrak's *Empire Builder* route. See **Figure 4-3** for the locations of the near-term passenger rail investments.

Figure 4-2. Amtrak Cascades train passing over the Willbridge Crossovers

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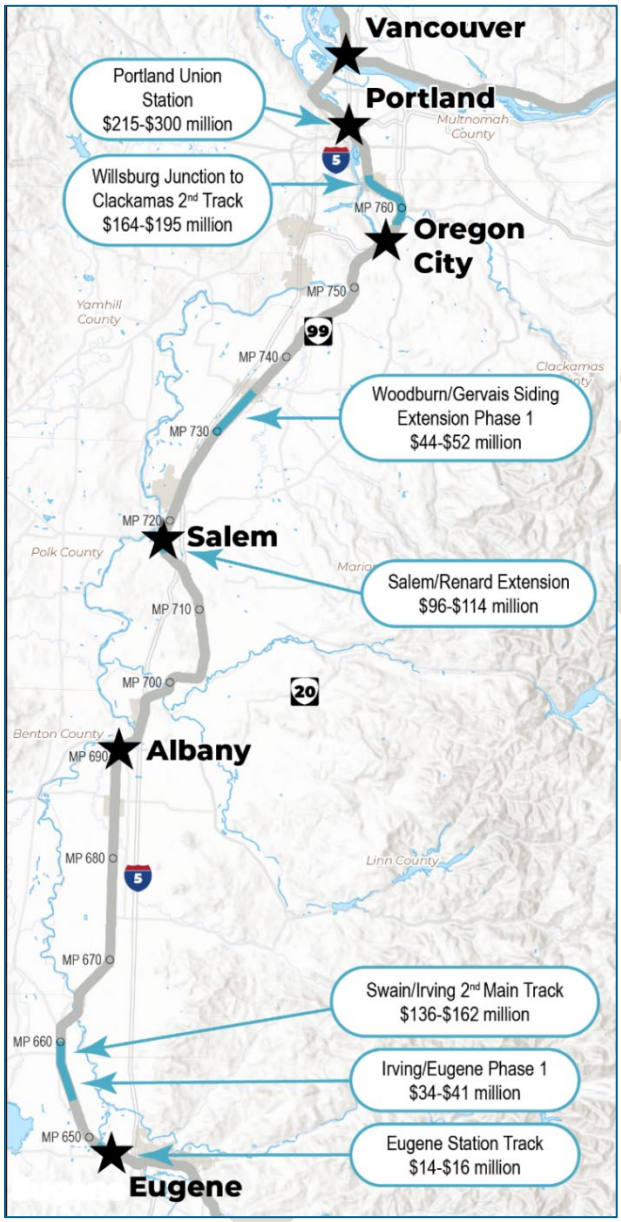
Figure 4-3. State-identified near-term passenger rail capital project locations



4.4 Evaluate rail financing alternatives

Rail investment in Oregon relies on a blended financing approach that integrates federal, state, local, tribal, private-sector, and innovative funding mechanisms. Because a significant portion of Oregon's rail infrastructure is privately owned, successful project delivery depends on coordinated partnerships among railroads, public agencies, ports, metropolitan planning organizations, local governments, tribal governments, and other stakeholders.

The state of Oregon plays a strategic role in directing limited public resources toward projects that advance statewide goals related to safety, economic competitiveness, mobility, environmental sustainability, and community access. Public investments help preserve critical infrastructure, improve system reliability, and leverage private and federal resources. Given the

limited availability of rail funding, Oregon's approach must remain flexible, opportunistic, and aligned with federal grant cycles and state priorities. As such, a key objective of the state's rail financing strategy is to strengthen Oregon's competitiveness for federal grant programs by maximizing opportunities to identify matching funds to maximize the investment of state transportation funding with federal dollars.

This section evaluates current funding sources, identifies financing challenges and constraints, and outlines strategies to support implementation of Oregon's rail investment program over both short- and long-term planning horizons.

4.4.1 Federal funding sources

Federal rail investment is primarily administered through the U.S. Department of Transportation, led by the Federal Railroad Administration for freight and intercity passenger rail programs; however, the Federal Transit Administration and the Federal Highway Administration also administer funding programs that can support eligible rail projects. Following the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act of 2015, which introduced a specific Rail Title for the first time,[2] and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Transportation Reauthorization of 2021, federal rail funding has expanded significantly, with a strong emphasis on competitive, discretionary grant programs. These programs require eligible applicants to compete for funding through comprehensive applications that demonstrate project readiness, benefit-cost justification, address safety outcomes, and align with federal priorities. Nearly all programs require a non-federally funded "local" match, which may include state funds, local contributions, or private sector investment. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act expires in 2026, and the first draft versions of its replacement as approved by the United States House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee[3] maintain both the overarching Rail Title within the Surface Transportation Authorization and all of the programs summarized herein, though ultimate future funding levels will not be confirmed until approved by Congress.

Though rigorous, it is important to continue pursuing federal funding opportunities when appropriate and consistent with Oregon's investment decision-making framework. Oregon should also continue advocating for the expansion, reauthorization, and long-term funding of federal rail programs, as they represent an increasingly important source of funding for rail investments. Federal funding supports a wide range of passenger and freight rail projects, helping to advance safety, mobility, economic development, and system reliability. Key federal programs are described below and listed in **Table 4-6.**

1. **The Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program** provides large-scale capital funding for projects that improve or expand intercity passenger rail service, address state-of-good repair needs, enhance operating performance, or involve privately operated intercity passenger rail service. Eligible projects often require strong state sponsorship and coordination with passenger rail operators, including Amtrak. The Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail typically provides 80 percent federal funding with a local 20 percent match requirement.

[2] Title IX of H.R. 22 – 114th Congress

[3] https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/8870

2. **The Corridor Identification and Development Program** was established under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to guide the development of new and enhanced intercity passenger rail corridors. The Corridor Identification and Development Program provides a structured pathway from planning through project development and into capital funding eligibility. The Amtrak Cascades corridor is included in this program, with the Washington State Department of Transportation serving as the lead and the ODOT acting as a coordinating partner and supporting project development activities south of Portland Union Station for Oregon segments. The Corridor Identification and Development Program is intended to accelerate funding for corridor improvement projects for state-supported passenger rail services through a non-competitive funding process, once admitted in the program. The Corridor Identification and Development Program funds between 80 to 100 percent of required funding depending on project step.
3. **The Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Program** supports freight and passenger rail infrastructure improvements, including safety, capacity, and efficiency updates that improve the reliability of freight and passenger rail systems through various investments, such as infrastructure, technology, grade crossing, and more. The program is a flexible source of funding for multimodal and freight rail projects with system-wide benefits and typically provides a maximum of 80 percent federal funding with a local 20 percent match requirement.
4. **The Railroad Crossing Elimination Crossing Safety Program** funds projects that eliminate or improve at-grade crossings to enhance safety, reduce congestion, and improve multimodal connectivity. It is the first program of its kind, focusing on large grade crossing elimination projects with the requisite magnitude of funding, and application requirements tailored to the profile of these large projects that have made them a challenge to fund in the past (such as not requiring the benefit-cost analysis typical of most federal construction grants). The Rail Crossing Elimination Program typically provides 80 percent federal funding with a local 20 percent match requirement.
5. **The Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development Grant Program** funds surface transportation projects with significant local, regional, or national benefits. Eligible projects include freight or passenger rail improvements, as well as transit, ports, and other modes. The Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development Program (formally RAISE and TIGER) remains an important source for rail projects and typically provides a maximum of 80 percent federal funding with a local 20 percent match requirement.
6. **The Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects Program** funds large freight and highway projects that have regional or national significance, not just local improvements, typically at least $100 million. Eligible projects include intermodal connectors (rail/truck/port interfaces) and other freight movement improvements. The program typically provides 60 percent federal funding, requiring a 40 percent local match.
7. **The National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program** funds large capital projects that are too big for most other discretionary programs, typically at least $100 million across transportation modes (rail, transit, highway, ports, etc.). The program typically provides 60 percent federal funding, requiring a 40 percent local match.

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8. **The Restoration and Enhancement Program** supports the start-up or expansion of intercity passenger rail service, especially during early operating years. The program is often paired with other programs. These grants typically ramp from providing 90 percent to 30 percent federal funding over a 6-year timeline.
9. **The Railway Highway Crossing (Section 130) Program** is a long-standing federal program that provides formula funding to states to improve safety, such as crash reduction efforts, at public railway-highway crossings, as discussed in Chapter 1. In Oregon, Section 130 funding is an important source of federal assistance for smaller-scale crossing safety improvements, such as warning device upgrades and other safety enhancements, but it is generally not intended to fund large-scale grade separation projects, such as grade crossing eliminations.
10. **State Safety Oversight Program:** This Federal Transit Administration-administered program requires states with rail transit systems to oversee and enforce safety of rail transit systems, including light rail, and street cars. The program is funded under 49 United States Code Section 5329, which is provided on a federal reimbursement basis and typically requires a 20 percent state match. In Oregon, the non-federal match is supported through the Transportation Operating Fund. Smaller supplemental sources, such as trolley-related revenues, also contribute to program support.

Table 4-6. List of federal rail and multimodal funding programs

Federal Funding Program	Typical Match Amounts (Federal % / Non-Federal Share %)
Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Program	80/20
Corridor Identification and Development Program	90/10 (Step 1) and 80/20 (Steps 2 and 3)
Railroad Crossing Elimination Crossing Safety Program	80/20
Better Utilizing Investment to Leverage Development Grant Program	80/20
Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects Program	60/40*
National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program	60/40*
Restoration and Enhancement Grants	Sliding scale (varies by year of operation)
Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety (Section 130) Program	Formula funding (generally up to 90% federal)
State Safety Oversight Program	Formula funding (typically 80/20)

**INFRA and MEGA may provide a higher federal share for projects in rural areas or under certain statutory exceptions, but the standard maximum federal share for most projects is 60%.*

Table 4-7 summarizes key Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act programs and their annual appropriations across Federal Fiscal Years) 2022 through 2026. The table highlights funding levels for major Federal Railroad Administration and United States Department of Transportation discretionary and formula programs supporting passenger rail, freight rail, and multimodal infrastructure investments. These programs represent the primary funding

mechanisms available for advancing rail capacity, safety, and service expansion under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021.

Table 4-7. Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021 annual appropriations

Federal Funding Program	Agency	Federal Fiscal Year 2022[4]	Federal Fiscal Year 2023	Federal Fiscal Year 2024	Federal Fiscal Year 2025	Federal Fiscal Year 2026	Total
Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity	USDOT[5]	$2.3B	$1.5B	$1.5B	$1.5B	$1.5B	$8.3B
Amtrak National Network	FRA[6]	$4.7B	$3.2B	$3.2B	$3.2B	$3.2B	$17.5B
Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements	FRA	$1.6B	$1B	$1B	$1B	$1B	$5.6B
Railroad Crossing Elimination	FRA	$600M	$600M	$600M	$600M	$600M	$3.0B
Federal State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail	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	FRA	$480M (5% of FSP funding)	$480M	$360M	$360M	$360M	$2.04B[7]

*Note: *B denotes billions of dollars; *M denotes millions of dollars.*

4.4.2 State funding sources

While federal programs provide a significant share of rail funding opportunities, state funding sources form the foundation of Oregon's rail investment strategy and its ability to deliver and implement rail projects. Investments in rail infrastructure in Oregon rely primarily on state funding sources that support capital and operational improvements for passenger, freight, and rail transit systems. These programs are essential for advancing statewide rail priorities, maintaining existing assets, and leveraging federal discretionary grant programs. Oregon's rail funding portfolio includes dedicated rail programs, multimodal transportation funds, and supplemental revenue sources administered by the ODOT and the Oregon Transportation Commission. Key state funding programs are described below and listed in **Table 4-8**.

[4] Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Annual Appropriations.

[5] United States Department of Transportation

[6] Federal Railroad Administration

[7] Federal Railroad Administration is allowed by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to utilize 5 percent of appropriated Federal-State Partnership monies to fund the Corridor Identification and Development 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).

Table 4-8. List of state rail and multimodal funding programs

State Funding Program	Funding Source
Connect Oregon Program	Lottery-backed bonds supported by Oregon Lottery revenues /Privilege and Use Tax authority
State Rehabilitation Fund	State General Fund
Statewide Transportation Fund	Statewide payroll tax
Grade Crossing Protection Account	State Highway Fund and DMV-related revenues
Gross Revenue Fee	Fees paid by railroad carriers operating in Oregon

1. **The Connect Oregon Program** serves as the state's primary multimodal transportation program and represents a significant source of funding for rail projects[8], providing state funding for freight and passenger rail, and multimodal transportation projects in the absence of a dedicated, ongoing funding source for these investments. The program is funded through lottery-backed bonds to make capital investments in track rehabilitation, rail access and capacity projects, intermodal facilities, rail safety enhancements, and more. Projects are evaluated through a competitive application process requiring documentation of project readiness, demonstrated public and economic benefit, and mobility improvements to Oregon's transportation system. Eligibility criteria typically include a 30 percent of total project cost private match contribution to ensure fiscal responsibility and financial capacity. In 2024, the legislative session authorized limited use of program funds to support eligible applicants in leveraging federal discretionary grants, where explicitly approved. For example, the Willbridge Crossovers project used Connect Oregon funds as a match for federal investment and to attract additional match contributions from Amtrak and BNSF Railway. Connect Oregon delivers lasting improvements to Oregon's critical transportation infrastructure and develops new economic opportunities for the state.

2. **The State Rail Rehabilitation Fund** is a dedicated program focused on preserving and improving Oregon's short line and regional rail infrastructure[9]. It supports state-of-good repair investments such as track and bridge rehabilitation, helps maintain freight rail service, protects rail-dependent industries, and works to prevent diversion of freight traffic to highways. The fund is administered by ODOT and is often used in coordination with federal rail grants and private railroad investment.

3. **The Statewide Transportation Fund** provides a stable, dedicated revenue source for public transportation through a statewide payroll tax. The fund supports transit operations, capital investments, and planning activities, including rail transit services such as light rail, streetcar, and commuter rail.

4. **The Grade Crossing Protection Account**, funded through the State Highway Fund and Department of Motor Vehicles registration revenues, supports safety improvements at highway-rail grade crossings. Investments focus on reducing vehicle-train and pedestrian-

[8] https://www.oregon.gov/ODOT/Programs/Pages/ConnectOregon.aspx

[9] https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/displayDivisionRules.action;JSESSIONID_OARD=hOZkNkzP2gWM9KObjl_rsdsgFIk4P-WtoaVRkAIcEDaQN_ys7MGb!1129229310?selectedDivision=8094

train conflicts through various safety measures, such as upgraded warning devices, and related infrastructure improvements.

5. **The Gross Revenue Fee** is paid by railroads and supports rail-related improvements, including crossing safety, infrastructure maintenance, transportation network mobility, and passenger rail accommodation enhancements.

In addition to state-supported programs, Oregon rail investments are funded through a range of dedicated state revenue sources and transportation funds (**Table 4-9).**

Table 4-9. State revenue source and transportation funds

Name	Description	Funding Mechanism
Transportation Operating Fund	Transportation Operating Fund revenues are derived from gas taxes collected on fuel sold for non-road use, such as lawn equipment,. The fund serves as a flexible funding source for projects and programs that are ineligible for highway or federal funds. It also plays a critical role in supporting operating expenses and providing the required state match for federal programs.[10] For example, the State Safety Oversight Program.	State fuel tax revenues
Department of Motor Vehicles Custom License Plate Revenues	Fees from custom license plate purchased through the DMV help fund passenger rail operations, including Amtrak services.	Vehicle custom license plate fees
Legislative Appropriations and Oregon General Fund	The Oregon Legislature provides additional funding through direct appropriations and General Fund allocations to support rail and transit investments.	State legislative appropriations
Gross Revenue Fee	The Gross Revenue Fee is paid by railroads based on gross revenues and supports rail safety, crossing safety, infrastructure maintenance, and passenger rail improvements.	Railroad gross revenue-based fees
Grade Crossing Protection Account	The Grade Crossing Protection Account, supported by the vehicle registration revenues and the State Highway Fund, funds safety improvements at highway-rail grade crossings, reducing vehicle-train and pedestrian-train conflicts.	State Highway Fund and vehicle registration revenues

Table 4-10 summarizes recent Oregon rail program funding and illustrates the state's reliance on short-term or variable funding sources.

[10] https://www.oregon.gov/odot/about/pages/transportation-funding.aspx

Table 4-10. Recent Oregon rail program funding (2025-2027)

Program	Funding	Source	Notes
Rail Safety Section	**$75K**	Federal Railroad Administration Railroad Safety State Participation Grant	Federal funds, travel and training grants
	$6.9M	Gross Revenue Fee paid by Railroads	Other Funds
Rail Crossing Safety	**$1.4M**	Gross Revenue Fee paid by Railroads	Other Funds
	$2.1M	Grade Crossing Protection Account	
		Comes from vehicle registration fees	
	$6M	23 United States Code Section 130 Funds	Federal as Other Funds, Projects funds to eliminate hazards at railway-highway crossings
State Safety Oversight Agency Program	**$3.1M**	Federal Transit Administration Section 5329 Program Grant Funds	Federal Funds, 80 percent of Program Funds
	$796K	Transportation Operating Fund	State Funds, Required State Match, 20 percent of Program Funds
	$5K	Trolleys	Other Funds
Passenger Operations and Planning	**$7.7M**	Custom License Plate Fees	Amtrak Operating Expenses - $10.2M
	$12M	Transportation Operating Fund	
Other Projects	**$14M***	Willbridge Crossovers	Federal, Amtrak, BNSF Railway, State (Connect Oregon)
	$16.2*	Eugene Layover	Federal, Amtrak, State (Connect Oregon)

**Pending discretionary grants*

4.4.2.1 Connect Oregon Program

Across Connect Oregon funds I through IX rail projects received $250.1 million of the $552.9 million awarded under Connect Oregon, 45 percent of the total, as shown in **Table 4-11**. Example rail projects included:[8]

- $3.7 million improvements in Union Pacific Railroad's Hinkle Yard, reducing average terminal dwell time for Oregon shippers from 4.2 hours in 2007 to 2.7 hours in 2011.
- $7.7 million for City of Prineville rail depot transloading and warehousing facility.

Table 4-11. Connect Oregon rail funding

Connect Oregon Funding Round	Total Available Funding	Number of Rail Applications Submitted	Total Amount of Rail Funding Requested	Number of Rail Projects Awarded	Total Amount of Rail Projects Funded*	Percent of Connect Oregon Funding Awarded to Rail
I	$96,307,329	45	$148,722,167	19*	$42,921,190	38%
II	$96,984,690	38	$77,356,689	13	$56,522,025	58%
III	$94,092,883	21	$87,921,145	16	$40,421,535	43%
IV	$37,908,893	20	$28,292,727	10	$12,671,158	33%
V	$41,565,474	18	$34,997,554	7	$15,075,296	35%
VI	$42,506,727	11	$80,239,897	7	$12,155,059	25%
VII	$60,150,000[11]	Not Applicable[12]	Not Applicable	4	$57,550,000	Not Applicable
VIII	$45,097,635	21	$40,081,695	7*	$3,752,790	10.5%
IX	$38,297,176	10	$15,172,136	7*	$9,074,188	19%
X	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	**$552,910,807**	**184**	**$512,784,010**	**90**	**$250,143,241**	**-**

**Source: Connect Oregon Funded Project List. Connect Oregon Modal Allocation. ODOT Freight Planning Unit, 2019. Values in the Total CO Available Funding column are slightly lower than previously published in the 2014 Rail Plan due to canceled projects following awards. For CO I, there were 4 canceled projects out of 19. For both CO VIII and CO IX, original rail projects awarded were both 7, however, both contained a canceled project which brought actual rail projects funded down to 6 for both, and to 15 for CO I. These changes are represented in the actual rail amount funded column, which excludes the canceled projects.*

4.4.2.2 Grade crossing protection account

The Grade Crossing Protection Account is funded through state highway funds. Each year, this account shall be accredited $300,000 plus an amount equal to 50 percent of the cost of carrying out the duties, functions and powers imposed on ODOT by Oregon Revised Statue 824.200 through 824.256.[13]

4.4.2.3 Transportation operating funds

The program currently receives approximately $18.7 million, biennially, from Transportation Operating Funds used for passenger rail operations, planning, the State Safety Oversight Program and federal project match. The Transit Section receives $6.5 million for operations. There are questions about the availability of this fund in future biennia.

[11] The $60,150,000 represents funding the legislature directed to four specific rail projects instead of conducting a competitive Connect Oregon funding round. Oregon Legislative Assembly, *Enrolled House Bill 2017*, 2017, section 714, page 79.

[12] After Connect Oregon VI, the process for awarding Connect Oregon funds changed from the competitive application process used in earlier funding rounds. As a result, submitted rail application, funding request data, and percent of funding awarded to rail are not applicable for Connect Oregon VII.

[13] The GCPA is directly addressed in ORS 824.018.

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4.4.2.4 Custom vehicle license plate fees

The program currently receives approximately $6.6 million annually, from custom vehicle license plate fees. These funds are used for passenger rail operations and planning.

4.4.2.5 State rail rehabilitation fund

In 1985, the Oregon Legislature authorized the State Rail Rehabilitation Fund to support rail line acquisition, rehabilitation, and improvement, as well as rail planning and other activities intended to reduce the impacts and costs associated with the loss of rail service. However, the Oregon Legislature has not appropriated funding for the program. When available, ODOT has allocated revenue from railroad right-of-way leases to support eligible projects.

4.4.2.6 Federal highway fund

The Commerce and Compliance Division of ODOT receives approximately $3 million annually in Federal Highway Administration Section 130 funds for railway crossing safety projects. These projects are usually accomplished with cooperation from ODOT's highway division as well as other state, county, city, and local agencies.

4.4.2.7 Gross revenue fee

ODOT's Commerce and Compliance Division receives approximately $3.5 million annually through gross revenue fees paid by railroads operating in Oregon. The current fee structure was established in 1995 and helps fund ODOT's responsibilities related to railroads, including safety and regulatory oversight.[14]

4.4.2.8 Private Sector Contributions

Private-sector participation is fundamental to Oregon's rail investment strategy due to the privately owned nature of much of the rail network. Freight railroads, industrial shippers, ports, and developers frequently invest in capital improvements that enhance operational efficiency and support commercial benefits. This participation typically occurs through cost-sharing agreements for capacity or safety improvements, direct capital investment in rail infrastructure, public-private partnerships for corridor or terminal development, and in-kind contributions such as right-of-way access or design support. Successful recent examples in Oregon include collaborative projects such as the Willbridge Crossovers improvements, which combine federal, state, Amtrak, and private railroad funding sources.

4.4.3 Rail Financing Constraints and Challenges

Despite significant recent federal investment and a diverse portfolio of funding programs, Oregon continues to face structural challenges in financing rail infrastructure and services. Most notably, the state lacks a dedicated, sustainable funding source for passenger and freight rail investment. While the State Rail Rehabilitation Fund is a rail-dedicated account established in statute, it does not receive a stable, recurring revenue stream. Oregon's Industrial Rail Spur Program faces a similar challenge. The program was established under Oregon Revised Statutes, Chapter 367, Section 70[15] to support economic development by providing financial assistance

[14] Oregon Department of Transportation, *Dedicated Revenue Sources and Balances*, 2026; Oregon Revised Statutes § 824.010 and § 824.014.

[15] https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_367.070

for the construction and rehabilitation of industrial rail spurs, which are short sections of track that connect industrial facilities to the broader rail network. The program previously provided approximately $8.53 million dollars for eligible projects;[16] however, the program currently has no funding and, therefore, cannot advance eligible projects despite the statutory framework already being in place. The Industrial Rail Spur Program[17] could help businesses build or maintain industrial spurs that provide direct access to the broader rail network and are often left to deteriorate. These spurs can serve as first- and last- mile connections, linking businesses to the rail system, which can be the biggest barrier to using rail.

By comparison, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Industrial Rail Access Program, established by the Massachusetts State Legislature in 2012, provides competitive grants to improve rail access for industrial and commercial use. The program has awarded funding for 75 projects[18] varying from rail spur rehabilitation and construction to railyard reconfigurations and expansions. Although Massachusetts' Industrial Rail Access Program has a broader scope than Oregon's Industrial Rail Spur Program, it demonstrates how consistent dedicated funding can facilitate freight rail investment and economic development. These programs illustrate Oregon's broader funding challenge.

Rail funding relies on a combination of discretionary programs, competitive grants, legislative appropriations, and other indirect revenue sources that are insufficient to provide long-term financial stability and address long-term system needs. As a result, this funding structure creates persistent challenges for maintaining existing passenger rail services, advancing capital improvement projects, preserving freight rail infrastructure, implementing established rail assistance programs, and providing the non-federal match required to maximize federal funding opportunities. Significant unmet funding needs remain across the rail system, including state-of-good repair investments and other rail safety improvements and reliability initiatives.

Funding constraints also affect Oregon's rail safety and oversight responsibilities. The State Safety Oversight Program relies on a combination of federal reimbursement and state matching funds from non-federal sources. As such, identifying stable and consistent state match funding remains challenging given competing demands on limited transportation revenues. As a result, funding uncertainty can affect ODOT's ability to maintain staffing levels and program capacity necessary to meet federal safety oversight requirements.

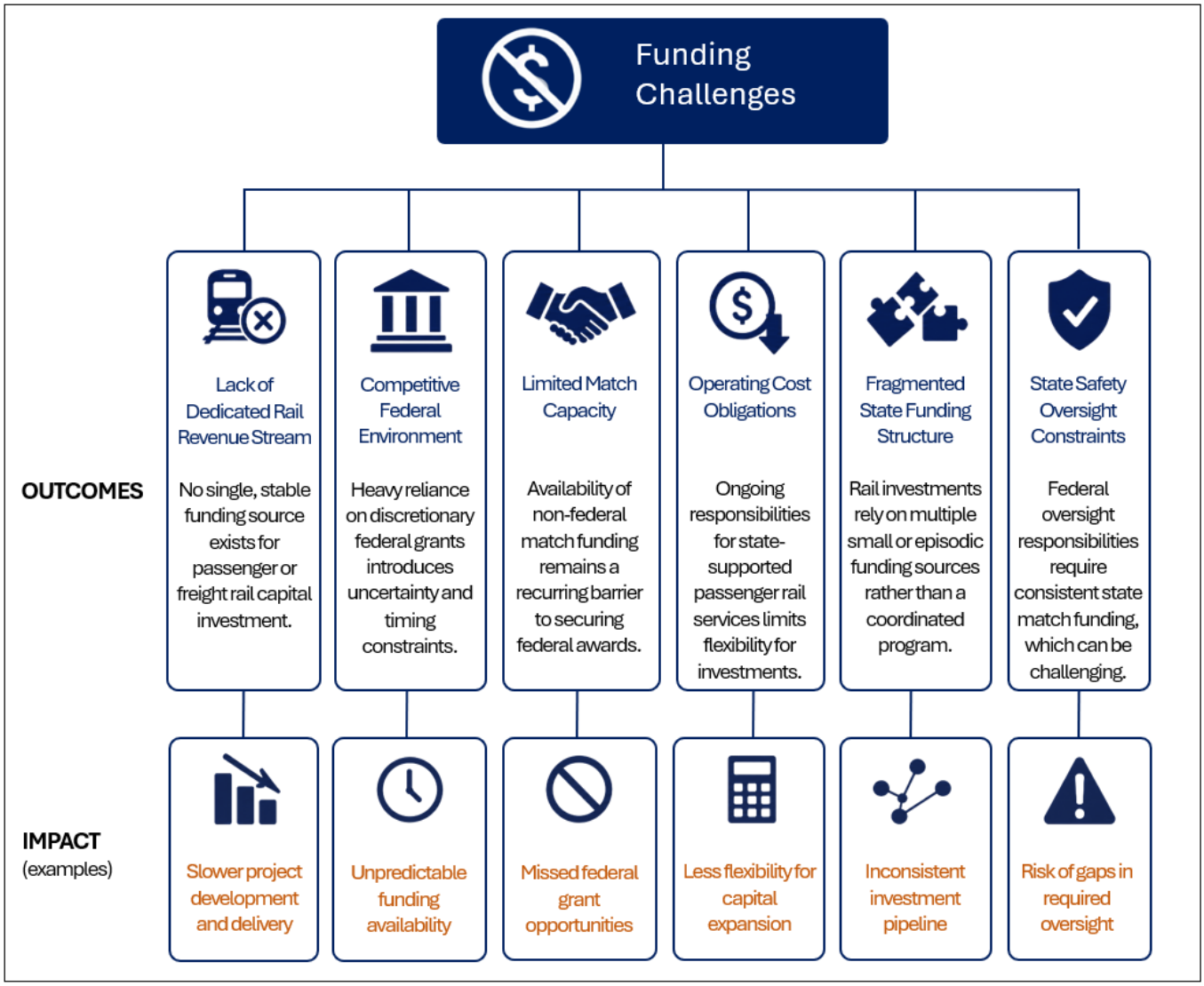
Passenger rail funding presents additional challenges. Oregon is responsible for supporting state-supported intercity passenger rail services, creating recurring operating and maintenance obligations that must be met before investments in service expansion, increased frequencies, or new corridors can be pursued. Without a dedicated and sustainable funding source for passenger rail operations, opportunities to expand service and respond to growing demand remain uncertain. Key challenges are illustrated in **Figure 4-4**.

[16] https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/2021R1/Downloads/CommitteeMeetingDocument/238649

[17] https://secure.sos.state.or.us/oard/displayChapterRules.action;JSESSIONID_OARD=eQA-jckgpcUrEs4g9O6mLboOjMwe3Vh8DFIWgocxF-cqQiyVRcNd!-1695933119?selectedChapter=108

[18] https://www.mass.gov/info-details/funded-irap-projects

Figure 4-4. Key rail financing challenges



These constraints limit Oregon's ability to implement long-term rail investments, advance strategic corridor improvements, and support the growing demand for safe, reliable, and efficient passenger and freight rail services.

4.4.4 Financing strategy and implementation approach

Addressing Oregon's rail funding challenges and advancing implementation of the Rail Investment Program will require a diversified and coordinated financing strategy. Key elements of this strategy include:

- Leveraging Federal Discretionary Funding Programs: Federal discretionary grant programs will remain critical sources of funding for rail investments in Oregon. Maximizing participation in these programs will require continued investment in project development, benefit-cost analysis, environmental review, and alignment with federal priorities.

- Strengthening Non-Federal Local Match Capacity: Strengthening Oregon's match capacity through coordination of state funding programs, as well as local, Tribal, and private-sector contributions, will improve Oregon's ability to leverage federal investment opportunities, particularly for highly competitive discretionary grant programs.
- Expanding Public-Private Partnerships: Much of Oregon's rail infrastructure is privately owned, so continued collaboration between public agencies, railroads, ports, and private-sector partners is essential. Public-private partnerships can help distribute project costs, align infrastructure investments with operational needs, and maximize the return on public investment.
- Improving Program Coordination: Greater coordination among state transportation funding programs can help reduce fragmentation and improve the strategic deployment of limited resources. Aligning investment decisions across programs will support statewide rail priorities while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public expenditures.
- Long-Range Investment Programming: A balanced investment strategy addresses both near-term system needs and long-term growth opportunities.
    - Near Term (0-5 Years): Focus on state-of-good repair investments, rail safety improvements, project development activities (particularly for passenger rail projects), and advancement of construction-ready projects that are competitive for federal funding.
    - Long Term (6-20 Years): Prioritize corridor development, passenger rail expansion, freight capacity enhancements, system modernization, and other transformational investments supported by sustainable funding sources.
- Scenario-Based Investment Planning: Established in 2017, the Statewide Transportation Investment Fund represents Oregon's most significant long-term investment in public transportation. Although this funding is not available for intercity passenger rail or freight rail projects, it may support local rail transit such as commuter rail, streetcar, and light rail systems. By providing a dedicated funding source for local transit, the fund also helps reduce competition for other limited transportation revenues that may be able to support broader rail system investments.

4.5 Rail policies and strategies

For each of the goals introduced in the beginning of this chapter, additional background, and supporting policies and strategies have been defined to assist the state and Oregon's rail stakeholders in achieving the Oregon State Rail Plan vision. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the use of goal numbers offers a convenient way to refer to each individual goal and is not intended to imply goal prioritization.

4.5.1 Goal 1 – partnership, collaboration and communication

Goal statement: *Partner, collaborate and communicate with rail system operators and other stakeholders to maximize benefits, align interests, remove barriers and bring innovative solutions to the rail system; and foster public understanding of rail's importance.*

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4.5.1.1 Background

Nearly all the rail systems in Oregon are owned by private companies that make investments based on business considerations. However, rail is a vital part of the state's multimodal transportation network and part of a national network that requires planning, partnership, collaboration and open communication between the public and private sector. The state therefore has a responsibility to increase awareness about the benefits of rail and promote the importance of partnerships with private rail carriers.

Collaboration in this context refers to public-private and public-public partnerships that identify system "needs" through effective planning (such as this State Rail Plan). The planning process realizes benefits when investments are delivered, programs are established, and policies implemented. Collaboration extends to local jurisdictions concerning the integration of rail facilities and systems into communities as well as local land use decisions that protect and preserve rail corridors. Interstate collaboration involves multi-state and multinational corridor projects across public and private partners, which is a core element of Oregon's State Rail Plan Vision.

4.5.1.2 Policies

1.1 Coordinate between system owners, operators, jurisdictions, adjacent states, Tribal governments and other partners to ensure the rail system is integrated as a component of the broader multimodal transportation network in Oregon.

1.2 Work with local jurisdictions, Tribal partners and railroads to coordinate land use plans and policies to preserve and protect rail corridors and consider community needs in relation to the rail system.

1.3 Communicate the benefits of the rail system in Oregon.

4.5.1.3 Strategies

1a. Work collaboratively with private railroads, jurisdictions, Tribal partners and agencies, both within Oregon and in other states, to pursue system improvements and operations that mutually benefit stakeholders over the long term.

1b. Participate in working groups with rail service providers to plan and review operations in shared-use (e.g., freight and passenger) corridors.

1c. Participate in multistate and bi-national freight and passenger planning efforts to identify mutually beneficial improvements and compatible operations in multistate and bi-national rail corridors.

1d. Coordinate and participate in rail-related projects and advisory groups that include shippers, carriers and railroads, including enhanced rail perspectives in Area Commissions on Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Tribal governments and local advisory boards and state advisory committees.

1e. Work with local jurisdictions, Tribal governments and private industries to coordinate local planning activities and interactions with Class I and short line railroads and service providers.

1f. Provide planning guidance (e.g., transportation system planning guidance, model zoning ordinances, design standards and best practices) to regional and local jurisdictions to minimize conflicts from incompatible land uses in rail corridors.

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1g. Integrate rail system considerations in state, Tribal, regional and local system and facility plans. Provide guidance documents that promote best practices for multimodal transportation planning and rail integration.

1h. Provide guidance and contact information to Tribal and local jurisdictions and other partners seeking to plan for, make investments in or conduct work near railroad facilities.

1i. Actively engage ODOT Regions, Area Commissions on Transportation, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, Tribal governments, the general public and others. Provide public information on freight and passenger rail benefits (including system congestion, economic, environmental and sustainability benefits), the availability of passenger rail service (as a means of encouraging ridership), objectives and opportunities as part of a multimodal transportation system and information on the benefits and opportunities for public-private partnerships in rail.

4.5.2 Goal 2 – Connected system

Goal statement: *Promote, preserve and enhance an efficient rail system that is accessible and integrated with Oregon's overall multimodal transportation system.*

4.5.2.1 Background

To work well in Oregon's transportation system, rail can't operate alone. Rail must connect easily with other ways to travel (like buses, bicycles and cars) and link up smoothly with other train networks. Rail corridors and services must be connected within the state and across the nation by linking major population and employment centers and industrial users to suppliers and markets.

From the first mile to the last mile, each element of a connected system has a distinct role, and the effectiveness and efficiency of the system is only as good as the performance of the weakest link. Promoting, preserving and enhancing rail services and connections ensures that travel options are available to keep communities and businesses moving efficiently.

As noted in Chapter 3, rail can also play an important role in providing transportation system redundancy and resiliency in the event of roadway closures during natural disasters. Having separate, dedicated rail lines ensure a transportation network can survive disruptions and doesn't automatically halt the movement of people and goods during a disaster. In addition, the Oregon Resilience Plan[19] identifies high-priority rail routes and recommends these routes meet seismic standards to improve system resiliency.

4.5.2.2 Policies

2.1 Make investments that enhance the integration, efficiency, safety and reliability of rail connections with intermodal freight facilities and access by industries and businesses that could benefit from rail services in urban and rural areas of the state.

2.2 Enhance and promote an intercity passenger rail system that is easy to use, frequent, reliable, cost-effective, affordable, offers competitive travel times and promotes access and transportation connectivity for all potential users, including the transportation disadvantaged.

[19] Oregon Seismic Safety Policy Advisory Commission, *The Oregon Resilience Plan: Reducing Risk and Improving Recovery for the Next Cascadia Earthquake and Tsunami*, February 2013, Chapter 5, Transportation.

2.3 Enhance and promote a commuter rail system for intra-regional mobility that is easy to use, frequent, reliable, cost-effective, affordable, has competitive travel times and promotes access and transportation connectivity for all potential users, including the transportation disadvantaged.

2.4 Explore the feasibility and practicality of high-speed passenger rail service in the Amtrak Cascades corridor through corridor assessment, visioning work and planning for improvement projects.

2.5 Collaborate with local, regional, Tribal, state and federal partners to ensure efficient and coordinated response to special emergency and disaster events.

4.5.2.3 Strategies

2a. Increase rail use by Oregon industries and businesses through programs, investments and facilities that help aggregate freight rail traffic and Cargo-Oriented Development consistent with private railroads' business models; work with communities to develop land use plans that encourage and provide incentives for industrial land uses near rail lines.

2b. Emphasize intermodal, multimodal, and first- and last-mile connectivity to key multimodal facilities, including ports.

2c. Work toward rail system connectivity, resiliency and redundancy within the overall transportation system to help Oregon mitigate and recover quickly from natural disasters or human-caused disruptions.

2d. Provide incentives under new or existing funding programs to encourage system owners to adopt best practices to identify and address system vulnerabilities and to reduce recovery times. Ensure that short-line railroads are eligible for these incentives.

2e. Support and make investments to improve accessibility within and to various regions of the state, including east-west connectivity and connectivity across state lines consistent with strategies on passenger and commuter rail service and stops.

2f. Enhance and promote intercity and commuter passenger rail services as a viable and cost-effective choice for travelers, taking into consideration travel market characteristics (size of market, frequency and time of day characteristics of travel, cost and convenience of competing alternatives). Work to increase ridership through educating the public about the availability of passenger rail services.

2g. Evaluate new intercity and commuter passenger rail services across Oregon using six criteria including:

- Financial viability. Assess ridership and revenues to ensure service justifies the investment.
- Cost effectiveness. Evaluate both capital and operational costs over the infrastructure life cycle.
- Community and economic benefits. Assess economic and social costs for the state, Tribal governments, regional and local jurisdictions as well as accessibility for different passenger needs.
- Alternative analyses. Compare other transit modes (e.g., buses) and infrastructure to determine the most practical approach.

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- Goal and policy consistency with state plans. Ensure proposals support goals of the Oregon Transportation Plan and Oregon State Rail Plan.
- Host railroad feasibility. Identify requirements of the host railroad to ensure proposed service can be accommodated operationally and with infrastructure of host railroad.

2h. Continue to work with the Federal Railroad Administration on a Corridor Project Inventory/Corridor Investment Plan, to facilitate decisions on future rail service in the Amtrak Cascades corridor, including general rail alignment, communities where stations could be located, number of daily trips, travel time objectives and the rail technology to be used.

2i. Work with Washington State on high-speed rail efforts from Portland to Vancouver, British Columbia with connections to Oregon's Amtrak Cascades service.

2j. Work with Washington State on improvements and advancements of service, including evaluation of proposals to add station stops based on benefits and disadvantages for the entire service.

2k. Support and make investments in intercity bus transportation and transit services that enhance, supplement and expand access and connectivity of the intercity and commuter passenger rail networks in Oregon.

2l. Work with railroads, state, Tribal governments, regional and local jurisdictions to plan for integrated multimodal station areas with connectivity to the local street network, intercity bus and local transit systems, micro-transit, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

4.5.3 Goal 3 - System Stewardship

Goal statement: *Enhance transportation system reliability, expand capacity, frequency and travel times through investments that preserve and improve freight and passenger rail assets and infrastructure.*

4.5.3.1 Background

Bottlenecks, capacity needs and other system deficiencies degrade the performance, safety and attractiveness of the rail system. Deficiencies that impact system travel time and reliability influence whether freight and passenger customers choose rail, how frequently, and if they return in the future. Maintaining passenger and freight rail system conditions in a state of good repair that aligns with system demand and economic development potential ensures residents and businesses receive the most efficient rail service among their modal options. Investing in rail lines with shared passenger and freight operations increases service reliability for both freight and passenger customers and can provide capacity that allows for more frequencies and shorter travel times.

The further loss of rail corridors or right-of-way eliminates development opportunities that could be rail served in the future. Oregon will proactively collaborate with jurisdictions and Tribal governments to strategically preserve and protect rail services and corridors so that rail services continue to function and that future system expansion is possible. Rail abandonment should only occur as a last resort if there are no justifiable reasons to save the line or right-of-way.

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4.5.3.2 Policies

3.1 Make investments in rail corridors in partnership with private railroads, Tribal governments and other jurisdictions to eliminate choke points, improve network fluidity, and maintain the rail system in a state of good repair. Public investments should be made in projects that address needs identified in the State Rail Plan, consistent with the investment principles and policies of the State Rail Plan.

3.2 Preserve the rail system service, infrastructure and assets in Oregon to meet existing objectives and capitalize on future opportunities.

4.5.3.3 Strategies

3a. Evaluate the benefits of designating strategic rail facilities and corridors and their role in informing public investment and planning decisions.

3b. Leverage and support Class I railroad investments to eliminate critical bottlenecks and choke points.

3c. Leverage investments and support short line railroads to upgrade track and maintain the system in a state of good repair where there is a demonstrated rail system, economic and public benefit for the state and/or region, and when a viable long-term business plan has been demonstrated. Work may include incentives for businesses to locate and utilize rail assets. Oregon's Pioneer Industrial Rail Spur Fund or similar improvement opportunities are one example of these incentives.

3d. Eliminate at-grade crossings wherever possible as required by statue (ORS 824.202). Give priority for closing crossings with the highest safety risk, greatest potential for train conflicts with other modes, severe traffic backups or freight bottlenecks, and redundant crossings, utilizing the Oregon Highway-Rail Grade Crossing Safety Action Plan. Where rail grade crossings provide an important route for local pedestrian, bicycle or vehicle circulation, the needs of these local movements must be considered in decisions for closing or modifying existing crossings or adding new crossings.

3e. Make and facilitate investments that address intermodal terminal and rail yard capacity needs consistent with the State Rail Plan (e.g., identification or provision of suitable sites and assistance with permitting requirements), where there is market support for such facilities.

3f. Factors for decision making on rail line preservation actions should include, at a minimum:

- Existing industry base using the line.
- Potential industrial customers not presently using the line but have line access.
- How the line is connected to the national railroad system.
- Geography of the line and its existing and future service territory.
- Circumstances affecting operating costs and revenue potential.
- Regional vision for the future service area over the next 50 years.

3g. Preserve the rail system through a hierarchy of investment and action:

- 1) Preserve Service - Continue rail service on an endangered line through partial subsidization of the railroad operator, acquisition of the line by the public, or some combination of methods to keep service on the line.

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- 2) Preserve Infrastructure - Preserve the right-of-way and improvements (e.g., track structure) that occupy the right-of-way through means such as acquiring the corridor or otherwise preserving the infrastructure in place for some indeterminate period. Corridors may be brought back to operation at any time, although more resources will likely be required to resume service the longer the corridor is out of operation.
- 3) Rail Banking - Invoke rails-to-trails legislation to preserve the right-of-way for interim trail use and the potential for the future return of railroad use. The railroad may salvage track but should leave the bridges, tunnels, embankments, etc., for trails.

4.5.4 Goal 4 - Funding, Finance and Investment Principles

Goal statement: *Establish funding that meets the critical needs of the rail system in Oregon and achieves the objectives of this State Rail Plan.*

4.5.4.1 Background

Oregon's lack of dedicated, sustainable funding for rail investments is one of the top challenges facing both the passenger and freight rail systems in the state. Without funding, Oregon does not have the resources to improve, maintain and operate passenger rail services. Funding programs are also needed to maintain and improve the freight rail systems that are vital to Oregon's businesses and economy. The lack of a dedicated funding program positions Oregon at a disadvantage when compared to other states with established programs and dedicated funding sources for freight and passenger rail support and investment. Consequently, identifying matching federal discretionary grant funding is much more challenging for Oregon than other states that compete for federal funds. Establishing a publicly accepted funding and financing structure/mechanism to address the short- and longer-term rail needs identified in this Plan is paramount.

4.5.4.2 Policies

4.1 Preserve and improve the freight, passenger and commuter rail transportation system where there are public benefits to Oregon, its businesses and its communities.

4.2 Preserve and improve the rail system in ways that:

1) emphasize operations and non-financial participation before capital investment;
2) preserve and encourage competition between freight railroads;
3) encourage private investment that advances state economic development goals;
4) leverage state participation by allocating cost responsibility among beneficiaries; and
5) require projects to have viable business plans and proposals.

4.3 Develop a permanent rail funding and finance structure that addresses the public funding and critical needs aspects of rail investments.

4.5.4.3 Strategies

4a. Develop and maintain a short-/long-range rail investment needs inventory in partnership with railroad owners and operators that is consistent with needs identified in the State Rail Plan.

4b. Utilize performance measures and benefit/cost-type tools that inform evaluation of rail investments based on benefits to Oregon's economy, improved freight and passenger mobility, improved safety, and improved environmental conditions of the transportation system in Oregon.

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4c. Make investments that benefit system operations for freight, intercity passenger and commuter rail service (or do not degrade one service type in favor of another), that eliminate conflicts in shared-use corridors and among modes and that allow for future service improvements.

4d. Maximize and leverage railroad investments through Connect Oregon and other multimodal funding programs.

4e. Work towards securing a sustainable State funding source to address freight, passenger and commuter rail system priorities for both capital improvements and operations.

4g. Use public-private and public-public partnerships for railroad investment that benefits both private and public objectives.

4.5.5 Goal 5 - System Safety

Goal statement: *Plan, construct, operate, maintain and coordinate the rail system in Oregon with safety and security for all users, rail workers and communities as a top priority.*

4.5.5.1 Background

Rail safety relies on partnerships between railroads, federal and state agencies, local communities and emergency response providers. The ODOT Commerce and Compliance Division ensures compliance with state and federal regulations related to track, locomotives and rail cars, hazardous material transport and railroad operating practices.

Safety and security remain Oregon's top priorities for all rail operations, consistent with the Oregon Transportation Plan requirement that safety take precedence over all other transportation goals. Shared freight and passenger corridor operations, exclusive right-of-way and street running, at-grade rail crossings, and trespassing on private rail property are specific areas where rail safety and security is a concern and solutions will be coordinated with private-sector and local community partners, including emergency response providers.

At-grade rail crossings are a point of conflict between freight and passenger rail operations and the traveling public using crossing facilities. While Oregon has a statute to eliminate crossings wherever possible, project cost, weighed against the available resources, expected benefits and consideration of local conditions, may result in application of alternate mitigation approaches. Inspections, safety education and awareness programs are key components to improving rail system safety.

4.5.5.2 Policy

5.1 Improve the safety and security of the rail transportation system for users including operators and employees, passengers, recipients of goods and services, users of other transportation modes, communities and property owners.

4.5.5.3 Strategies

5a. Coordinate and support safety and security awareness programs, for example Operation Lifesaver, operational improvements, new technology and equipment, inspections, enforcement activities, and coordinated response plans and training that promote overall system safety and security.

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5b. Further the safety and security of employees working on the rail system, passengers on the rail system, communities near the rail lines and the commodities being transported by rail.

5c. Work in partnership with railroad operators, state and federal agencies, Tribal governments, local communities and emergency response providers to provide for the safe and secure transport of commodities throughout the state.

5d. Increase safety through reduction, prevention or management of potential conflicts between rail and other users of the transportation system.

5e. Design transportation projects to avoid, reduce or address potential safety concerns with at-grade or grade separated crossings in coordination with the ODOT Policy, Data and Analysis Division.

4.5.6 Goal 6 - Sustainability and Community Vitality

Goal statement: *Increase use and investment in freight and passenger rail systems to meet Oregon's goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improve Oregon's natural environment and support thriving communities.*

4.5.6.1 Background

Both passenger and freight rail system benefits can help to meet Oregon's quality-of-life objectives. Rail connects residents to jobs, enhancing livability by providing more travel choices, increasing mobility and reducing commuting costs. Passenger and commuter rail can also spur economic development around station areas by coordinated land use planning and transit-oriented development. In addition, rail provides critical connections for underserved communities by linking them to urban centers, multimodal transportation facilities, and national or international markets.

Increasing the use of both passenger and freight rail also provides benefits beyond the rail system. By shifting trips and freight movement from highways to rail, Oregon can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fuel consumption, improve air quality, relieve roadway congestion, and reduce wear and tear on the highway system. These benefits can lower long-term roadway maintenance costs, improve travel reliability for all roadway users, and support the state's transportation, climate, and economic goals. Collectively, these benefits enhance Oregon's quality of life.

4.5.6.2 Policies

6.1 In setting priorities for system investments, explicitly take into account rail's role in supporting a transportation system that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and preserves the quality of Oregon's water, air and natural resources.

6.2 Consider and address environmental and community impacts and resources in rail transportation decisions.

4.5.6.3 Strategies

6a. Educate stakeholders and the public about the role the rail system plays in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, traffic congestion, and roadway pavement maintenance costs by removing freight traffic off highways.

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6b. Advance fuel-efficient rail operations, vehicle design and the use of cleaner fuels as part of Oregon's goal to move toward a cleaner and more diverse energy supply that protects people's health and the environment while making the system more resilient to oil price uncertainty and shocks.

6c. Make passenger and commuter rail improvements that enhance existing communities and neighborhoods and support the continued integration of residential, commercial and employment land uses.

6d. Provide planning guidance and work with local jurisdictions and railroads to better integrate and plan for passenger and commuter rail systems in land use plans (e.g., multimodal connectivity, station area planning and new or relocated stops policy).

6e. Leverage complimentary strategies as specified in the outlined goals of this rail plan to encourage freight rail utilization.

4.5.7 Goal 7 - Economic Development

Goal statement: *Increase opportunity and investment in freight and passenger rail assets to grow Oregon's economy.*

4.5.7.1 Background

The Oregon Freight Plan estimates that freight demand will grow by 92 percent between 2017 and 2050, comprising a substantial part of Oregon's overall economy. The Freight Plan estimates that industries that depend on moving goods account for 31 percent of Oregon's economy, and rail serves a substantial portion of these businesses. At the same time, Oregon is expected to add about 1 million residents through 2050, increasing passenger travel demands. Without preservation and strategic investments in the rail system, other modes will have to shoulder the load, and Oregon's highway system will experience increased congestion, accidents, and pavement deterioration. Both degenerative highway and rail systems will negatively impact Oregon businesses and reduce Oregon's economic competitiveness in an increasingly challenging global economy. Public rail system investments are critical to retaining Oregon's existing jobs and businesses and provide an opportunity to leverage private sector funds.

Rail also plays a key role in growing existing Oregon businesses and attracting new ones to the state. Maintaining and growing rail connections to ports and identifying opportunities to spur cargo-oriented development are two examples of investments communities can spearhead, in partnership with private sector partners, to contribute to state and local economic development efforts.

4.5.7.2 Policy

7.1 Utilize the Oregon rail system to promote economic activity and grow jobs throughout the state.

4.5.7.3 Strategies

7a. Coordinate private and public resources to provide rail system improvements and services that contribute to, or help develop, active and vital economic centers and jobs throughout Oregon.

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7b. Promote and support the co-location of economic activities and appropriate transportation facilities with convenient and reliable access to freight and passenger rail options.

7c. Leverage investments in the freight rail system to provide Oregon with a competitive advantage by moving goods faster and more reliably to regional, national and international markets.

7d. Make investments in the passenger rail system so that intrastate, interstate, and international travelers can travel easily for business and recreation.

4.6 Rail service and investment program summary

This section summarizes the key findings and recommendations presented in Chapter 4, which outlines the goals, framework, financing, and policies for maintaining and advancing Oregon passenger and freight rail transportation system.

- **Section 4.2 – Vision and Goals**
  Presents the long-term vision and goals that guide rail investment decisions.
- **Section 4.3 – Investment Decision-Making Framework**
  Describes the framework for identifying and evaluating rail investments needs.
- **Section 4.4 – Evaluate Rail Financing Alternatives**
  Identifies the funding mechanisms available to support passenger and freight rail.
- **Section 4.5 – Policies and Strategies**
  Outlines the policies and implementation strategies that guide future investments.

4.6.1 Vision and goals

The vision and goals presented in Section 4.1 provide the foundation for rail investment decisions in the state of Oregon. Oregon's vision is that "*Oregon will have a safe, efficient, and commercially viable rail system that serves its businesses, travelers, and communities through private resources leveraged, as needed, but strategic public investments*." To support this vision, the seven Oregon State Rail Plan goals were created; (1) Partnership, Collaboration and Communication, (2) Connected System, (3) System Stewardship, (4) Funding, Finance and Investment Principles, (5) System Safety, (6) Sustainability and Community Vitality, and (7) Economic Development. These seven goals align with the Oregon Transportation Plan goals and are considered with any rail investment decision to ensure public funding is directed toward projects that advance Oregon's long-term transportation objectives.

4.6.2 Investment decision-making framework

The investment decision-making framework explains the framework applied to identify projects that improve Oregon's freight and passenger rail network, while aligning with the overarching vision and goals. ODOT manages a centralized repository of potential rail projects, the Rail Needs Inventory, that allows public agencies, ports, consultants, businesses, and members of the public to propose projects through an online intake form.[20] The inventory is then categorized and evaluated using strategic factors and quantifiable criteria to ensure investment priorities are reviewed through a consistent and thoughtful process. The evaluation factors and criteria are created with consideration to various state planning documents, such as the Oregon State Rail

[20] https://www.oregon.gov/odot/rptd/pages/rail-needs-inventory-form.aspx

Plan and include the following six factors: (1) equity, (2) environment, (3) economic, (4) mobility, (5) readiness, and (6) safety. The factors are scored using flexible and dynamic criteria to ensure identified projects remain aligned with evolving funding opportunities and regulatory guidance. The investment decision-making framework was created with input from a range of stakeholders, including the Area Commissions on Transportation and the Federal Railroad Administration. When funding opportunities become available, ODOT applies the investment decision-making framework to evaluate which projects in the Rail Needs Inventory best align with the goals and specific requirements of each grant funding source, while also advancing the State Rail Plan's vision and goals.

4.6.3 Evaluate rail financing alternatives

Rail investments in Oregon are supported by blended sources of funding, combined with federal, state, tribal, private sector, and other innovate funding mechanisms. Federal and state programs provide most rail funding opportunities, including programs such as the Corridor Identification and Development Program administered by the Federal Railroad Administration and the Connect Oregon Program through ODOT. Notably, federal rail funding has expanded significantly following the Infrastructure and Investment Jobs Act of 2021 that introduced seven new programs to support rail investments; those programs are: (1) Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail, (2) Corridor Identification and Development Program, (3) Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements, (4) Railroad Crossing Elimination Crossing Safety, (5) Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development, (6) Nationally Significant Freight and Highway Projects, and (7) National Infrastructure Project Assistance. Altogether, appropriations totaled $77.24 billion for freight and passenger infrastructure investments across the national rail network. While significant, state funding is the bedrock of rail funding opportunities for Oregon, especially as federal programs typically require a non-federal match contribution. State programs are essential for advancing statewide rail priorities and maintaining existing assets. The five state programs currently used are: (1) Connect Oregon Program, (2) State Rail Rehabilitation Fund, (3) Statewide Transportation Fund, (4) Grade Crossing Protection Account, and (5) Gross Revenue Fee. Oregon rail investments are also funded through a range of dedicated state revenues, transportation funds, and private sector contributions. While rail funding opportunities grew on a federal level following the 2021 reauthorization, competing statewide demands and limited transportation revenues continue to create a challenging and competitive environment for securing adequate funding levels for making rail investments in the state of Oregon.

4.6.4 Rail policies and strategies

Rail plays a vital role in the state's transportation network and to ensure the vision and goals of the Oregon State Rail Plan are upheld in practice, a series of policies was created to align with each of the seven goals. To ensure partnership, collaboration, and communication (Goal 1) with rail system operators and other stakeholders, three policies were formed to endorse the importance of partnerships, especially considering Oregon's rail system is almost entirely owned by private companies. To ensure a connected system that promotes, preserves, and enhances an efficient rail system (Goal 2), four policies were created to outline the need for investments that enhance and promote intermodal facilities and intercity passenger rail services. To encourage system investments and preservation (Goal 3) that improve transportation reliability, two policies were formed to state the importance of reducing bottlenecks and enhancing the network. To support funding, finance and investment principles (Goal 4), three policies were established that

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state the need for rail preservation, improvements, and funding structures. System safety (Goal 5), which emphasizes safety and security as the top priority in the state of Oregon, stamps this message with one clear policy to continue making safety improvements to the rail network for all users. To preserve and enhance quality of life (Goal 6) in a manner that conserves and improves Oregon's environment and community cohesion, two policies were created that take into account the responsibility to protect the community and natural resources in rail transportation decisions. Lastly, to highlight economic development (Goal 7) and the importance of increasing investments in rail to grow Oregon's economy, a policy was created to promote economic activity and grow jobs through the state by better utilizing Oregon's rail system. Rail policies are further backed by specific strategies outlined in detail throughout the section.

4.6.5 Chapter 4 key findings summary

Oregon's freight rail network remains a critical component of Oregon's economy and passenger rail, including the *Empire Builder, Coast Starlight, and* state-supported Amtrak Cascades, provide essential mobility, connectivity, and economic benefits that enhance quality of life for Oregon's residents, businesses, and visitors. Thus, identifying opportunities for ensuring a safe, reliable, and modern rail transportation system is of critical importance. Achieving these objects requires strategic investment decisions, sustainable financing approaches, and strong partnerships among federal, state, local, and private sector stakeholders. Although securing sufficient funding and competing for discretionary federal grant opportunities continues to present challenges, Oregon has successfully advanced significant rail investments that demonstrate how state, federal, and private investments can be leveraged to improve rail system performance. The policies, strategies, and financing approaches presented in this chapter position the state to respond to emerging opportunities. Chapter 4 provides a comprehensive framework for making informed rail investment decisions that preserve existing assets, improve system performance, and position Oregon's rail network to meet future transportation needs.

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Chapter 5. Coordination, Review, and Next Steps

Chapter 5 describes how ODOT coordinated with stakeholders, Tribal governments, and gathered public input while developing the Oregon State Rail Plan (the State Rail Plan). The Oregon Transportation Commission and ODOT aim to involve the public in important agency decisions. To do this, the Oregon Transportation Commission adopted a Public Involvement Policy that meets state and federal public participation requirements, including requirements for statewide planning. The State Rail Plan process followed the policy by:

- Inviting public participation while the State Rail Plan was being developed;
- Following ODOT public involvement processes;
- Involving community members and other stakeholders in developing the State Rail Plan; and
- Meeting or exceeding all applicable public participation requirements for the State Rail Plan.

Project staff communicated with stakeholders mainly by email, phone interviews, and committee meetings. At meetings, staff presented information and led group discussions. For the public, ODOT shared information through a project website, background materials, videos, project updates and notices about upcoming outreach activities. Community members could sign up for email updates. The planning process requires public meetings, and ODOT supports them. The project team held a public meeting and provided an online community feedback tool during the formal public review of the Draft State Rail Plan. The following sections give more detail about the process and outreach activities.

5.1 Project public involvement and communications plan

At the start of the project, the team created the Public Involvement and Communications Plan (The Public Involvement Plan) for the State Rail Plan. The Public Involvement Plan described how the team would engage interested parties in meaningful ways. The team identified different stakeholder groups and involved community members throughout the planning process. The State Rail Plan's public involvement goals are listed below:

- Share complete, accurate, clear, and timely information with statewide rail and transportation interests and others throughout the project.
- Involve the Rail Advisory Committee[1] and consider committee members' perspectives to build broad support for the State Rail Plan's information and strategies.
- Seek participation from potentially affected or interested individuals, communities, and organizations.
- Coordinate with neighboring state departments of transportation, as appropriate.
- Comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Commission policies, and environmental justice objectives.
- Consult with Tribal governments to provide opportunities to seek input on the planning process and gather input on Tribal rail needs.

[1] The Rail Advisory Committee represents the railroad industry and supports ODOT rail freight and passenger services and project selection: https://www.oregon.gov/odot/rptd/pages/rac.aspx

- Follow a public involvement process that meets applicable state and federal laws and requirements, including the Oregon Transportation Commission Public Involvement Policy, and reflects local policies, goals, and objectives.

5.1.1 Key audience and messages

As noted above, engagement efforts sought input from people, communities and organizations that may be affected by or interested in the State Rail Plan, including:

- Railroad owners and operators
- Freight warehousing and shipping interests
- Passenger rail interests
- General public
- Elected officials
- Cities and counties
- Special Districts such as transit and ports
- Area commissions on transportation
- Interested federal and state agencies
- Applicable ODOT advisory committees
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations
- Environmental interests
- Traditionally underserved populations
- Tourism interests
- Tribal governments

The Public Involvement Plan identified these key messages to communicate to community members regarding the Rail Plan process:

- The State Rail Plan will identify the rail system's current capabilities and plan for future freight, passenger, and commuter rail needs in Oregon.
- The State Rail Plan will explain the role of rail in Oregon's multimodal transportation system.
- The State Rail Plan will provide information and strategies to guide decisions about public investment in railroad infrastructure.
- The State Rail Plan is intended to improve quality of life and support economic development across Oregon.
- The rail planning process will provide opportunities for public review and input and will give access to the technical and policy information used during planning. This includes at least a 45-day formal public comment period on the Draft State Rail Plan.
- The Oregon Transportation Commission will adopt the State Rail Plan as the state approval authority.
- The Federal Railroad Administration must accept the State Rail Plan before the project is complete.

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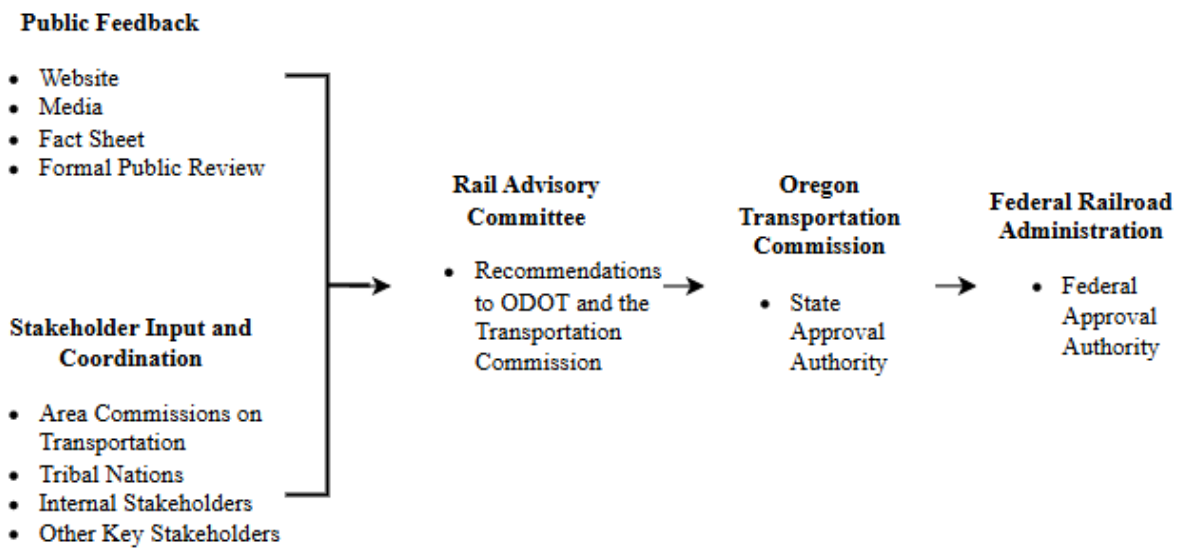
5.1.2 Decision-making structure

The Public Involvement Plan incorporated the State Rail Plan project's decision-making structure. The Oregon Transportation Commission is the final state decision maker. The Federal Railroad Administration also reviews the State Rail Plan as the federal approval authority and accepts it as a complete document. The Rail Advisory Committee made recommendations to ODOT and the Oregon Transportation Commission based on technical analysis and stakeholder input. ODOT sought input from area commissions on transportation, Tribal governments, and other key stakeholder groups during State Rail Plan development, especially during the formal public review period.

Broad stakeholder input informed decision making. The project team used an accessible and inclusive planning process to build support for the State Rail Plan and build a credible process. **Figure 5-1** shows the State Rail Plan's decision-making structure.

Figure 5-1. State Rail Plan decision-making structure



5.2 Key interested party interviews

As part of ODOT's State Rail Plan update, the project team interviewed key interested parties between November 2024 and July 2025. Participants included major rail operators, shippers, local and regional government officials, and advocates for rail expansion and safety improvements.

The interviews helped the team understand Oregon's rail system, industry concerns, and opportunities to improve freight and passenger rail service. Participants identified several priorities, including additional rail capacity, better infrastructure, reliable funding for rail improvements, more passenger rail service, and a shift to clean energy.

5.3 Community survey

The project team invited community members, stakeholders, interested parties, and people who live, work, or travel in Oregon to provide feedback through an online survey. Participants used the MetroQuest internet-based survey tool to share feedback on the State Rail Plan's goals, passenger and freight rail operations, service areas, and desired improvements. The online survey had three parts: closed-ended questions, an interactive map where respondents could drop pins and leave comments, and demographic questions. ODOT linked the MetroQuest tool on the main project webpage from March 17, 2025, through June 1, 2025. The survey received 1,465 submissions, and the mapping activity collected 3,600 responses.

5.4 Public agency coordination

ODOT coordinated with key agencies throughout State Rail Plan development. These agencies included the Federal Railroad Administration, the states of Washington, Idaho, California and Nevada, and ODOT divisions and offices.

5.4.1 Federal Railroad Administration

The 2027 State Rail Plan update followed the same process as shown in **Figure 5-1**, utilizing the Rail Advisory Committee. ODOT will transmit the State Rail Plan to the Federal Railroad Administration upon approval by the Oregon Transportation Commission.

5.4.2 Washington State Department of Transportation

ODOT worked with the Washington State Department of Transportation to coordinate planning efforts, especially for the Amtrak Cascades Corridor. Washington is preparing its State Rail Plan on about the same schedule as ODOT. ODOT and the Washington State Department of Transportation coordinated through staff calls and meetings and shared Draft State Rail Plan materials. Staff from both agencies also joined project stakeholder meetings when schedules allowed.

5.4.3 Oregon Department of Transportation

The ODOT State Rail Plan Project Manager coordinated with internal ODOT stakeholders, including ODOT regions, divisions and offices. This coordination helped align project activities and ensured the State Rail Plan was consistent with the Oregon Transportation Plan, statewide planning goals, and applicable state and federal policies and procedures.

The ODOT State Rail Plan Project Manager worked with the project team to prepare project reports and briefings for ODOT Executive Management. The project manager also coordinated with existing ODOT groups that meet regularly, including agency planning and technical leadership teams.

5.4.4 Area Commissions on Transportation

Area Commissions on Transportation are advisory bodies chartered by the Transportation Commission. They expand opportunities for local residents and jurisdictions to participate in ODOT decisions. Oregon has 11 such commissions that review regional and local transportation issues, especially issues related to the state system. These commissions work with other local

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transportation organizations and play a key advisory role in the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program and other ODOT plans. During the State Rail Plan public review period, the project team consulted each Area Commission.

5.4.5 Other states

ODOT has been in contact with the adjacent states of Idaho, California and Nevada regarding the State Rail Plan update. ODOT will solicit input from each state on the Draft Oregon State Rail Plan update during the 45-day formal public comment period.

5.5 Rail Advisory Committee

In 2005, ODOT created the Rail Advisory Committee to advise on issues that affect freight and passenger rail facilities and services in Oregon, and they play an important role in the planning process. The committee recommended the State Rail Plan to the ODOT Director and the Transportation Commission. The ODOT Director appointed committee members to represent a broad range of rail interests statewide, including:

- Johan Hellman (BNSF Railway) - Class 1 Railroads
- Aaron Hunt (Union Pacific) - Class 1 Railroads
- Ross Lane (Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Service) - Shortline Railroads
- Chris Myron (Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen) - Labor Unions
- Chase Kitchen (Amtrak) - Passenger Rail Lines
- Doug Allen (AORTA) - Rail Passenger/Transit User
- Toby Van Altvorst Toby (Goose Lake Railway) - Shortline Railroads
- Daniel Garrison (SMART ID Union) – Labor Union
- Tom Bouillion (Port of Portland) – Ports
- Jacob Snodgrass (Albany & Eastern Railroad) – Shortline Railroads
- Jeff Van Schaick (Jaguar Holdings) – Shortline Railroads

Throughout State Rail Plan development, the Rail Advisory Committee made decisions by consensus because high levels of agreement strengthened its recommendations to ODOT and the Oregon Transportation Commission. Rail Advisory Committee meetings focused on committee discussion and input, but the meetings were open for public observation. Each meeting included time for public comment.

The Committee met regularly to discuss study findings and help shape key parts of the State Rail Plan. The project team presented to the Committee at several meetings during State Rail Plan development. This included a summer 2025 meeting to review the findings from the community survey, a spring 2026 meeting to share draft progress, and a summer 2026 meeting focused on reviewing State Rail Plan materials and gathering committee input.

Rail Advisory Committee members also had the option to participate in one-on-one interviews with key project team members to discuss issues, needs, and opportunities for Oregon's rail system.

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5.6 Tribal consultation

The ODOT project team in coordination with ODOT's Tribal Affairs Office consulted with Tribal governments to provide opportunities to seek input on the planning process and gather input on transportation safety needs. Tribal consultation during the plan update was guided by applicable federal and state laws and policies.

Federal laws and policies for Tribal consultation

- United States Constitution Article VI, Section II on Treaties
- Presidential Executive Order 13175 Government-to-Government Relationship with Tribal Governments
- Executive Order 5201.1 on Department of Transportation Programs, Policies and Procedures Affecting American Indians, Alaska Native and Tribes

State laws and policies for Tribal consultation

- Oregon Department of Transportation ORS 182.162, Government-to-Government Relations Policy Statement
- Oregon Department of Transportation Tribal Consultation for Statewide Transportation Plans and Statewide Transportation Improvement Program

Consultation with Tribes followed ODOT's Tribal Relations Best Management Practices. ODOT initiated government-to-government consultation with the nine federally recognized Tribes in Oregon. ODOT also invited Tribes with ancestral or historical land in Oregon to consultation.

State of Oregon federally recognized Tribal governments

- The Burns Paiute Tribe
- The Confederated Tribes of the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians of Oregon
- The Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon
- The Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians
- The Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- The Coquille Indian Tribe
- The Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians
- The Klamath Tribes

Tribal governments with historical interests or ancestral lands in Oregon

- The Cowlitz Indian Tribe
- The Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- The Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- The Nez Perce Tribe
- The Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe
- The Fort Bidwell Indian Community of the Fort Bidwell Reservation of California
- The Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation

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5.7 Public review and comments

Oregon statewide plans require at least a 45-day public review and comment period before adoption. The project team catalogs all formal comments received during this period and decides whether the plan needs changes. If the team does not recommend a change, it documents the comment and explains the decision. The project team worked with the Rail Advisory Committee to finalize the State Rail Plan in response to public comments and reported the outcome to the Oregon Transportation Commission as part of State Rail Plan adoption.

5.8 Steps following plan adoption

Implementing the State Rail Plan will build on the Oregon Transportation Plan, other mode and topic plans, and federal legislation. The State Rail Plan's goals, policies, strategies, and investment framework give Oregon opportunities to use private investment and advance the rail projects and programs that matter most to communities and businesses across the state.

Some OSRP actions can happen in the short term. Others will require long-term commitments. Many implementation activities will depend on partnerships and coordination among government agencies, private railroads, shippers, and other stakeholders. Many actions also depend on available funding. ODOT developed the OSRP to be flexible and adapt to different funding scenarios for Oregon.

Early actions following the State Rail Plan adoption include:

- Submit the Transportation Commission-adopted 2027 State Rail Plan to the Federal Railroad Administration for acceptance under federal law.
- Identify and document key implementation activities for ODOT and other partners over the short- and long-term planning periods, based on State Rail Plan policies and strategies.
- Continue efforts to establish sustainable and reliable funding to meet Oregon's critical rail needs and advance the State Rail Plan's objectives.
- Coordinate with Washington State and the Federal Railroad Administration to complete Steps 2 and 3 of the Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan under the Administration's Corridor Identification and Development Program.
- Continue planning for the Cascadia High Speed Rail project with Washington State and the Province of British Columbia under the Corridor Identification and Development Program.
- Work with Washington State and other states, as applicable, to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of passenger rail services for Oregon.
- Use the State Rail Plan's investment decision-making framework,[2] when applicable, to identify projects that benefit the public, prioritize those projects, and consider how rail stakeholders should share funding responsibility based on the benefits they receive.
- Explain the role of rail in Oregon's statewide multimodal transportation system, describe the characteristics of rail in Oregon, and share information that can improve public and private rail partnerships.

[2] See section 4.3

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- Work with other statewide mode and topic planning efforts to improve rail connections, strengthen multimodal system connectivity and efficiency, and address issues between rail and other transportation modes.
- Continue improving rail system safety across ODOT's work.
- Use the information compiled for the State Rail Plan to develop and maintain short- and long-range rail investment needs and related materials so Oregon can pursue future funding opportunities.
- Monitor and assess State Rail Plan implementation to guide future amendments and updates, comply with federal law, and stay current on federal requirements for future funding opportunities.

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