

## Q3 2024 Report to Legislature

### Summary

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) co-funds the Amtrak Cascades intercity passenger rail service with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). Ridership for the third quarter of 2024 was the highest recorded in the history of passenger rail service in Oregon.

High-priority efforts are underway to improve passenger and freight rail in Oregon. Improvements to passenger rail will enhance the customer experience, namely by increasing the reliability of the service to get people where they want to go on time and in comfort.

The top priority efforts include 1) updating the Oregon State Rail Plan, 2) implementing the Oregon Cascades Service Development Plan (SDP), and 3) moving forward a project to apply for the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail grant.

The Peninsula Junction project was completed in mid-October. Completion of this project, along with the North Portland project, will decrease freight train interference with passenger trains thereby helping improve on-time performance (OTP).

### ***Key Q3 Ridership and OTP drivers***

- Ridership increases were driven by high gas prices, seasonal summer travel, and a popular schedule change between Portland and Seattle.
- OTP challenges included delays caused by freight and passenger train meets and reduced speed orders on the host railroad. Trespassers on the tracks and police activity continue to be a problem resulting in delays.

### **Status**

#### ***Ridership for July - September 2024***

- The third quarter of 2024 followed an exciting trend of increased ridership on the Oregon portion of the Amtrak Cascades. All three months in the third quarter had record high ridership culminating in a 31 percent increase over the same quarter in 2023 and a 17 percent increase over the prior quarter of 2024. The month of August produced over 16,000 riders for the first time in the history of the service.
- Eight out of the last nine months have been record-setting months for ridership as compared to the same months in previous years.

#### ***On-Time Performance for July - September 2024***

- OTP for northbound passengers from Eugene averaged 57 percent and southbound passengers from Portland averaged 46 percent.
- OTP decreased 26 percent over the third quarter of 2023 and increased by 4 percent from the second quarter to the third quarter of 2024.
- The longest delays this quarter were caused by freight and passenger train interference and slow order delays (speed reduction) due to weather.
- Delays this quarter were caused by:
  - 70 percent - Host railroad
  - 19 percent - Amtrak
  - 11 percent - Unassignable (i.e., trespasser strikes, weather-related delays, and drawbridge operation).

## **Current Progress and Next Quarter Look Ahead**

### ***Oregon Cascades Service Development Plan Implementation***

The Oregon Passenger Rail Service Development Plan (SDP) was adopted by the FRA in 2021. The SDP lays out the scope and approach for improvement and expansion of intercity passenger service between Eugene and Portland over the next 20 years. To implement the SDP, corridor modeling with Union Pacific (UP) and the FRA must be completed. This will produce a prioritized list of capital infrastructure projects needed to improve the line for both passenger and freight rail. The modeling is scheduled for completion this fall. The state is responsible for implementing the SDP by leveraging federal grants for infrastructure additions and improvements.

ODOT's entry into the new FRA Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID Program), along with WSDOT, is integral to SDP implementation. Since the Cascades Corridor was admitted into the CID Program in December 2023, Oregon and Washington have worked with FRA to advance their respective portions of the corridor through the program.

### ***FRA Funding and Grants***

#### Completion of the Peninsula Junction Project

UP completed construction of the \$1.3 million Peninsula Junction (Pen Junction) curvature realignment project in October. This project was funded through a Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) grant. This is the companion project to the completed North Portland Junction project. These projects will improve customer experience and OTP by allowing faster UP freight movement on and off the BNSF Railway (BNSF), reducing freight interference with the 16 daily passenger trains that pass through these junctions on BNSF track.

As background, UP freight trains use BNSF track between Portland and Tacoma, entering and leaving BNSF track at North Portland. North Portland and Pen Junction are close enough in proximity that a freight train will occupy both areas simultaneously. Completion of the Pen Junction and North Portland projects allows trains to travel at 25 mph (vs 10 mph) through the entire area thereby reducing incidence of delay to passenger trains caused by slow-moving freight trains. North Portland passenger train delays due to freight train interference are estimated to decrease by 61.5% from a baseline of 3,297 minutes in the 2017-2019 calendar years.

#### 2023-2024 Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Grant Application

ODOT submitted an application in May for \$1,500,000 of CRISI funds from the FRA for a passenger rail planning grant. The CRISI program is designed to improve railroad safety, efficiency and reliability, mitigate congestion at both intercity passenger rail and freight rail chokepoints to support more efficient travel and goods movement, enhance multi-modal connections, and lead to new or substantially improved intercity passenger rail transportation corridors. The award date is expected this fall. Funding from this grant would support assessment, phasing, and prioritization of infrastructure projects to provide rail improvements between Eugene and Portland.

#### 2023-2024 Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail Grant

The Federal-State Partnership (FSP) for Intercity Passenger Rail Notice of Funding Opportunity was released in October and ODOT is exploring three potential projects. Final selection will be based on match funds, host railroad approvals, climate and equity goals, and competitiveness.

##### Eugene Layover Siding

- Construct siding at the Eugene Station for Amtrak Cascades trains to detrain and entrain passengers, and for layover between runs.
- Construct a new power-operated switch and signals for accessing the new siding, availability of 480-volt standby electricity to allow locomotive shutdown lowering carbon emissions.
- Address ADA issues adjacent to the siding.

## Willbridge Crossovers

- Willbridge is 4.3 miles north of Portland Union Station where trains switch between the two mainlines.
- This project will allow train speeds to increase from 10 MPH to 35 MPH, supporting schedule reliability for passenger and freight trains entering and leaving northwest Portland freight yards.

## Portland Union Station

- Advance previous federally funded planning for building and railroad infrastructure improvements to 60 to 70 percent design.
- Provide a better cost estimate for future planning for the seismic rehabilitation of the 128-year-old station and modernize the public spaces while redesigning depot platforms to meet ADA requirements.
- Develop a strategy for long-term stewardship of the station and devise a capitalization strategy to move to construction phase.

## **2024 Oregon State Rail Plan**

The FRA requires an update to state rail plans every four years. The Oregon State Rail Plan (OSRP) was last revised in 2020 and ODOT started the update in May 2024. The [2024 State Rail Plan Update](#) website has been published and interested parties can sign up to receive [Oregon State Rail Plan updates](#) email. An on-line survey and interested party interviews will begin in October. Evaluating and ranking at-grade crossing highway rail crossings has begun. ODOT will utilize this information to improve safety and apply for federal funding for at-grade crossings.

## **Federal Railroad Administration Amtrak Long-Distance Service Study**

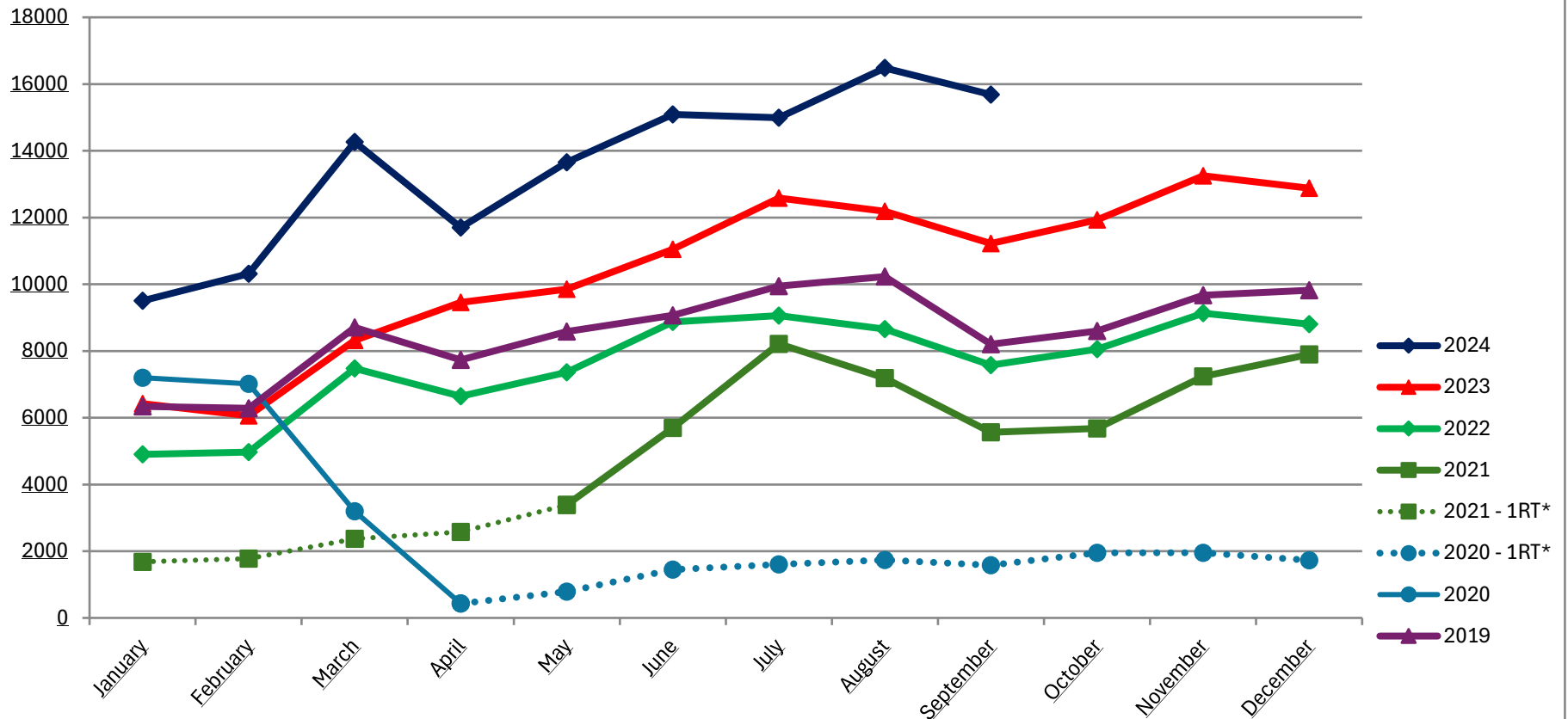
The FRA is conducting an [Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study](#) to evaluate the restoration of discontinued intercity passenger rail service and possible introduction of new Amtrak long-distance routes. A final report will be delivered to Congress in Spring 2025. ODOT, along with other western states, participated in four regional workshops with the FRA, the last of which was held June 6, 2024, in Missoula, Montana. The study identified 15 preferred routes to potentially complement Amtrak's existing long-distance service. Two of these, *North Coast Hiawatha* and the Oregon-routed *Pioneer*, were former Amtrak long-distance trains that were discontinued. The *Hiawatha* route has been granted federal Corridor Identification and Development Program status but for the other 14 preferred routes no sustained funding or program currently exists to advance their development beyond the long-distance study. The estimated capital costs of rolling stock, station and maintenance facilities, and track and signal upgrades necessary to resurrect the *Pioneer* range from \$2.9 to \$3.7 billion, and annual operating costs were estimated to range from \$96 to \$136 million. The timeline for accomplishing a service restoration such as the *Pioneer* is estimated at 10 to 15 years. The study's final report to Congress will include preferred options for restoring or enhancing long-distance service, a prioritized inventory of capital projects to restore or enhance service, and identify federal and non-federal funding sources that could fund more trains. Additionally, for each relevant Amtrak route selected, the report will estimate the costs and public benefits of restoring or enhancing intercity rail passenger transportation in the affected region. The report will offer recommendations for methods by which Amtrak could work with local communities and organizations to develop activities and programs to continuously improve public use of intercity rail service along each route.

## **Cascadia High-Speed Rail Project**

WSDOT continues to work with FRA to advance the Cascadia High-Speed Rail Project through the CID Program with support from ODOT, Metro, and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

WSDOT is working closely with the FRA to meet the requirements of Step 1 of the program so the corridor can move into Step 2 of the process.

## Amtrak Cascades Ridership in the Eugene – Portland Corridor Trains Operated Under Contract for the Oregon Department of Transportation

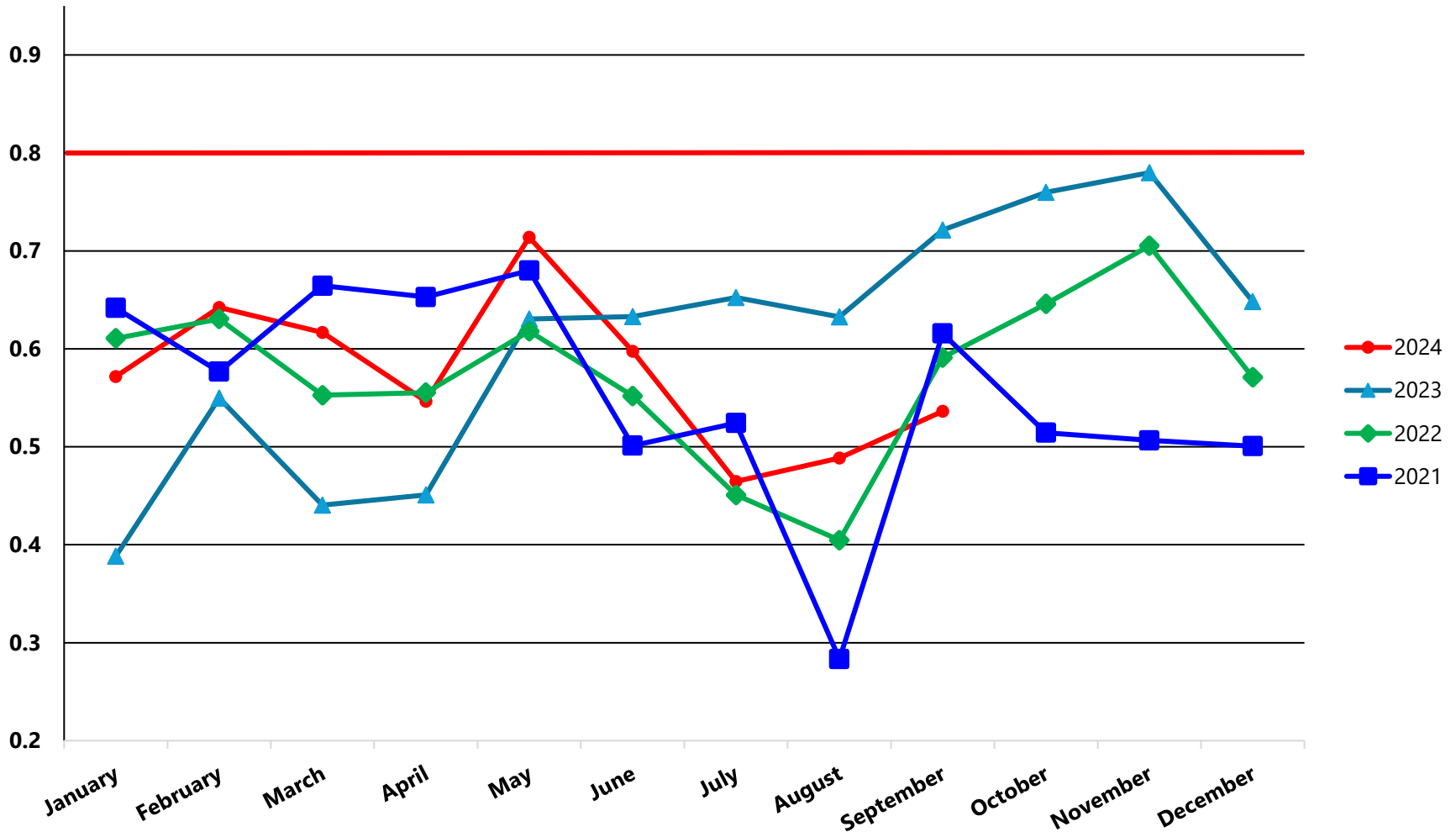


The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting decreases in demand led to the decision to reduce service to one round trip per day between Seattle and Eugene. Service was resumed to two daily round trips on May 24, 2021. The dotted lines above depict the timeframe when the service was reduced to one roundtrip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

\*RT = Roundtrip PDX-EUG

# Amtrak Cascades Customer On-Time Performance Eugene-Portland Corridor

## Trains Operated Under Contract for the Oregon Department of Transportation



The data presented is based on the new federal standards for OTP. This new standard measures the timeliness of each individual passenger rather than the train and represents the percentage of customers who reached their stations in Oregon no later than 15 minutes after their published scheduled arrival time.