

Q4 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 fourth quarter of 2024 has the highest ridership for any fourth quarter in our service.

Close working partnerships with Amtrak and the Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) helped achieve record ridership on the corridor. Even expected dips in ridership due to seasonal variances are still higher than any other years of the service.

ODOT continues efforts toward improving the service performance of the Cascades route. Projects recently completed are coming online and applications have been submitted for federal grants for infrastructure improvements to reduce delays. These efforts include improvements at Peninsula Junction, conducting corridor modeling with the host railroads to identify and prioritize infrastructure improvements, and updating the Oregon State Rail Plan.

Key Q4 Ridership and OTP drivers

- Ridership increases were driven by holiday and sports and entertainment events on the corridor.
- On Time Performance (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.

This report contains data produced from data supplied by Amtrak. For the sake of this report, November and December data may reflect minor changes in the ridership numbers for each month; however, the total ridership for the year will remain the same.

Status

Ridership for October - December 2024

- Year-over-year analysis shows the fourth quarter of 2024 closed the year with record ridership on the Oregon portion of the Amtrak Cascades. Compared to the fourth quarter of 2023, ridership is up 12 percent. Compared to the prior quarter, ridership decreased by 8 percent, but both quarters returned record ridership.
- Every month of 2024, with the exception of January, broke ridership records. ODOT's efforts with ongoing service improvements, effective marketing programs and close collaboration with partners help improve ridership and work toward improving the service.

On-Time Performance for October - December 2024

- OTP for northbound passengers traveling from Eugene to Portland averaged 64 percent and southbound passengers from Portland to Eugene averaged 61 percent.
- Year-over-year, compared to the fourth quarter of 2023, OTP decreased 13 percent. OTP decreased slightly from the third quarter to the fourth quarter of 2024 by 5 percent. An increase in mechanical issues, freight train interference, and trespasser events have all contributed to the decrease in OTP.
- 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:
 - 73 percent - Host railroad
 - 19 percent - Amtrak
 - 8 percent - Unassignable (i.e., trespasser strikes, weather-related delays, and drawbridge operation)

Current Progress and Next Quarter Look Ahead

Oregon Cascades Service Development Plan (SDP) Implementation

Oregon Cascades corridor modeling with Union Pacific Railroad and the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is projected to be completed in summer 2025, laying out the scope and structure for improving and expanding intercity passenger rail service between Eugene and Portland over the next 20 years. The modeling will produce a prioritized list of capital infrastructure projects to improve the line for both passenger and freight transportation, including capacity additions necessary for hosting more passenger train frequencies. Oregon is responsible for leveraging federal grants for infrastructure additions and upgrades to implement the SDP. This list will be incorporated into the Oregon State Rail Plan update and become the plan for improving passenger rail in Oregon. The Cascades Corridor's 2023 entry into the FRA's Corridor Identification and Development (Corridor ID) Program, through joint participation by ODOT and WSDOT, will facilitate securing grants.

FRA Funding and Grants: 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. ODOT submitted applications for the following projects:

- Eugene Station Layover Track Project, \$15 million including a match of \$3 million. Build a siding at the Eugene Station for Amtrak Cascades trains to detrain and entrain passengers, and for layover between runs which will eliminate conflicts between passenger and freight trains in the Union Pacific yard and the need to leave the Amtrak Cascades locomotives idling for hours. This work will improve on-time performance of the service and help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Willbridge Crossovers Project, \$12 million including a match of \$2.6 million. Replace the existing switches at the Willbridge Crossovers north of Portland Union Station which will allow trains to change tracks at 35 MPH helping support schedule reliability for passenger trains.

2024 Oregon State Rail Plan

ODOT has been focused on Oregon State Rail Plan public involvement, including conducting interviews with interested parties, with expected completion by the end of February 2025. ODOT will publish a public survey to further obtain input. This plan includes ranking at-grade highway rail crossings, which will be used to update the ODOT safety action plan of at-grade highway rail crossings and to rank potential grant applications.

Additional work includes analyzing freight rail travel flows to determine trends in commodities and historic context to inform strategic improvements to rail freight activity in the state. This work ties into the modeling work with Union Pacific Railroad.

Cascadia High Speed Rail Project

WSDOT received a grant award through FRA's Corridor ID Program for \$49.7 million. This funding will allow Washington, Oregon, and British Columbia to advance high-speed rail (HSR) as a tool to better connect the Cascadia region in the future. This funding award will support the technical planning effort across Cascadia and the engagement and collaboration with communities and partners along the corridor to understand their priorities for the future transportation system.

Since 2017, WSDOT, in partnership with Oregon, British Columbia and the private sector, has been exploring how HSR could better connect the Cascadia region, boosting our economic competitiveness and mitigating climate change. This project is in the preliminary stages of planning. An alignment and station locations have not been

identified. As a first step, Washington, Oregon and British Columbia will engage communities and partners along the corridor in conversations about their vision for high-speed rail in the region.

Federal funding remains essential to continue to advance Cascadia High-Speed Rail. WSDOT will continue to work with the FRA through the Corridor ID Program to fund future phases of work, including further environmental review of potential route options.

FRA Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study

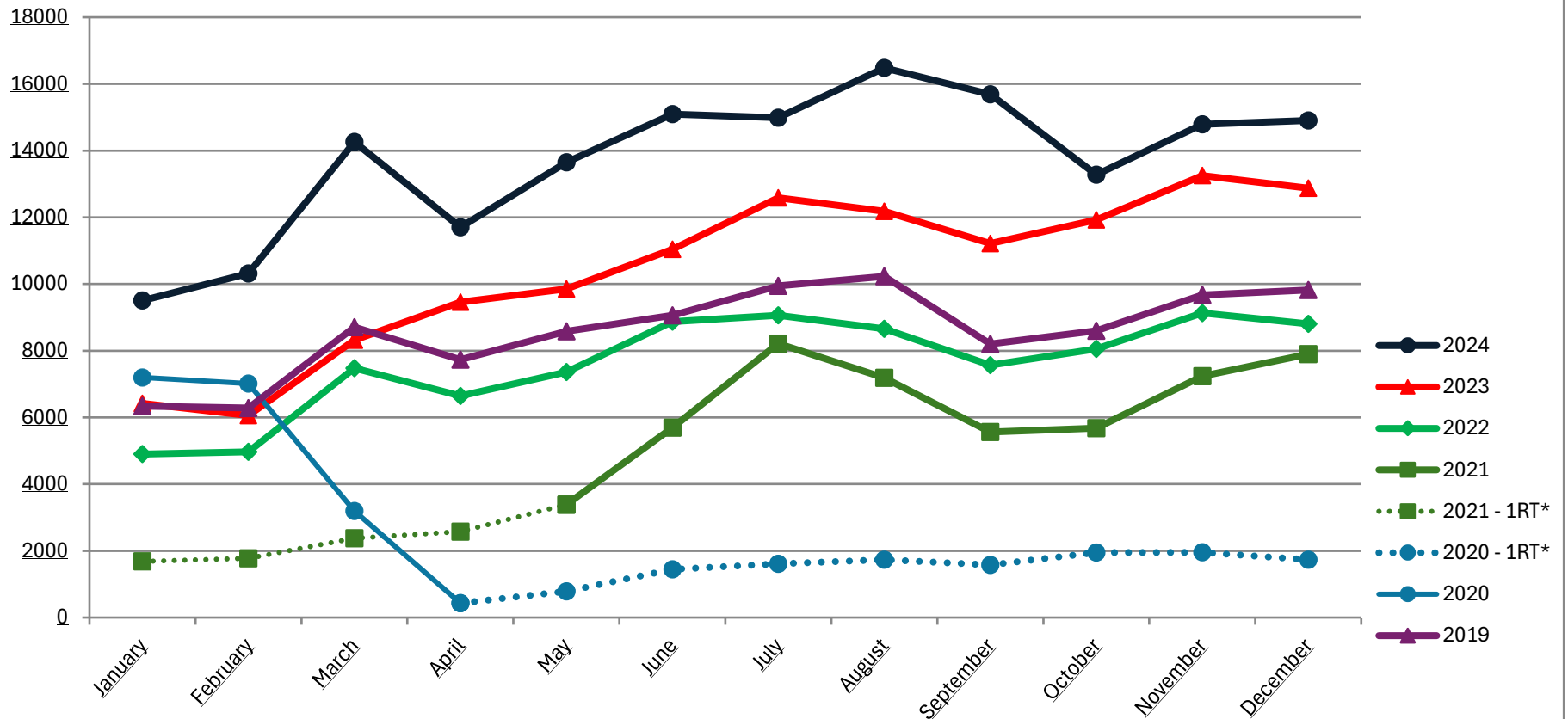
In January 2025 the FRA concluded and delivered to Congress the *Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Service Study* mandated by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) of 2021. The study evaluated restoration of daily intercity passenger rail service along Amtrak long-distance routes occurring on a non-daily basis or over routes previously operated but discontinued. Long-distance passenger rail service is defined by statute as routes of more than 750 miles between endpoints operated by Amtrak. One such route of particular interest to Oregon residents was the *Pioneer*, a train which operated between Seattle and Denver via Portland, LaGrande, Boise and Salt Lake City, that was discontinued in 1997. The study identified 15 preferred route options, one being *Seattle-Denver* which would replicate the former *Pioneer* between Portland and Denver. It could provide additional service between Seattle and Portland, and between Salt Lake City and Denver, while restoring service over approximately 773 miles between Portland and Salt Lake City via Eastern Oregon.

Estimated initial costs for restoring daily *Seattle-Denver* service ranged from \$650 million to \$840 million for equipment, \$1 billion to \$1.4 billion for stations and maintenance facilities, and \$350 million to \$450 million for necessary track, signalization and Positive Train Control upgrades. Estimated annual operating and maintenance costs for *Seattle-Denver* service ranged from \$75 million to \$106 million.

The study provided an initial prioritization of the 15 preferred routes and *Seattle-Denver* rated 7 out of a possible 15 points, placing it second from the bottom on the list of 14 evaluated options. (The 15th preferred route option was not ranked because it achieved Corridor Identification and Development (CID) Program status during the course of the study.)

FRA concluded its study is an initial step in a comprehensive process to identify actions needed to enhance long-distance service and its recommendations require much more planning, analysis, resources and time for development. The next step for the selected preferred routes is to initiate project planning activities but it is expected to require 15 or more years to advance from planning to initiation of operations. The study comprises the federal government's first network-wide review of Amtrak long-distance service in several decades and provides Congress with a tentative road map for a long-term rail program bringing world-class passenger rail service to regions across the country.

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

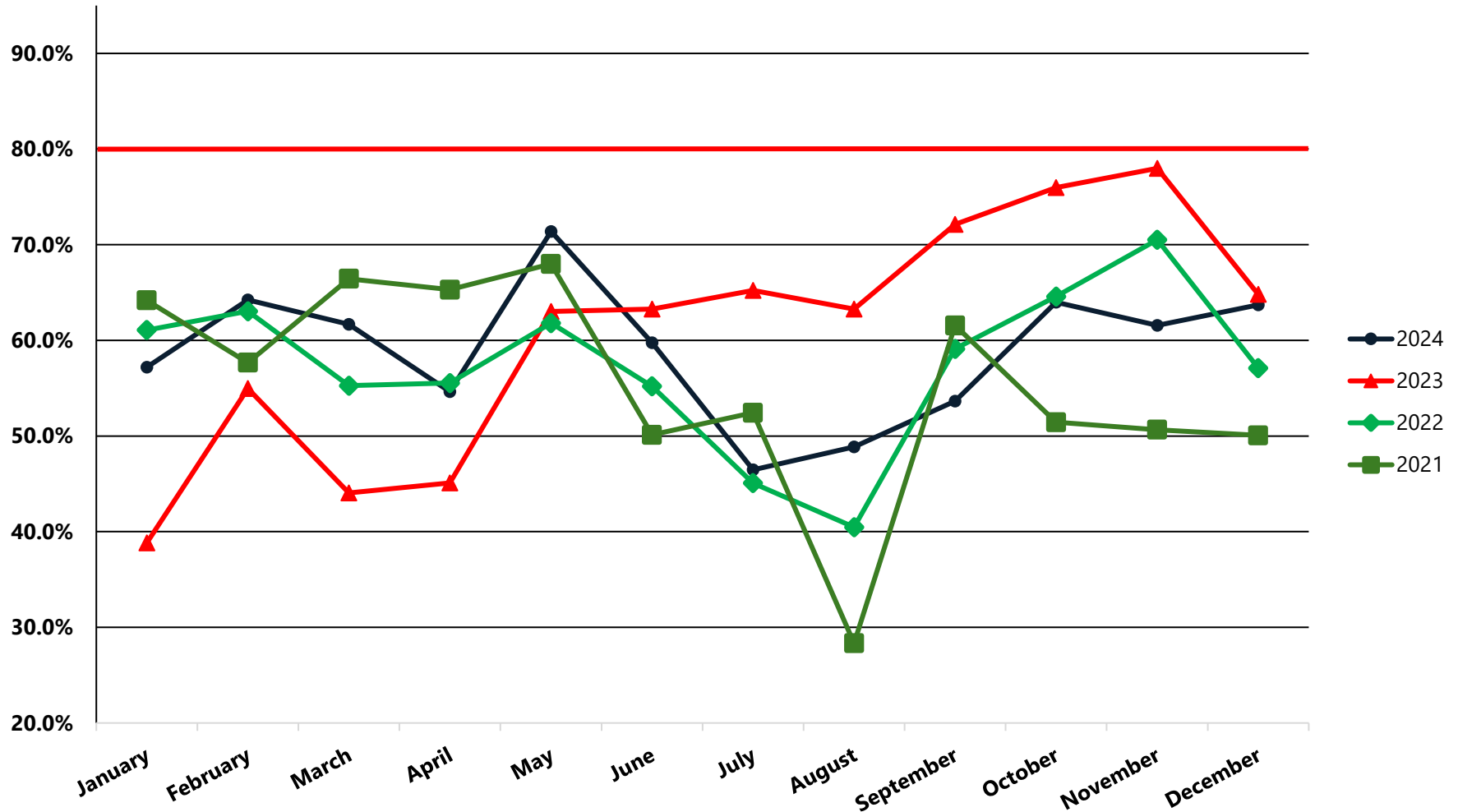


The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting decreases in demand led to the decision to reduce service to one round trip per day between Seattle and Eugene. Service was resumed to two daily round trips on May 24, 2021. The dotted lines above depict the timeframe when the service was reduced to one roundtrip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