

Rail Advisory Committee (RAC)

Tuesday December 17th

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

Meeting Minutes

Attending RAC Members

Bruce Carswell, Chair, Jaguar Transport Holdings

Johan Hellman, Co-Chair, BNSF Railway

Jake Boone, City of Garibaldi

Ross Lane, Genesee & Wyoming Railroad Service

Chase Kitchen, Amtrak

Chris Myron, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen

Bob Krebs, AORTA

Welcome, Introductions, and Committee Business

- Quorum confirmed
- 9-17-24 minutes approved
- Glenn Carey and Carmen Merlo are no longer members of the RAC due to changes in job positions.

Rail Trespassing Challenges and Trends

- Chris Malm, ODOT Rail Safety Manager, introduced a spreadsheet describing incidents of rail trespassing including location of the railroad and the resulting injuries and fatalities.
- The number of incidents is increasing.
 - 20 fatalities in 2024 due to rail trespassing.
 - 19 fatalities were pedestrians and represent 95 percent of total fatalities.
 - 9 fatalities occurred at at-grade-crossings.
 - 11 fatalities occurred in the right of way.
 - 12 injuries occurred this year.
- The largest number of fatalities that occurred in the previous five years was 16 fatalities meaning that 2024 has exceeded this margin by four.
- The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) provides support to reduce the number of incidents occurring.
- RAC Member, Ross Lane, recognized the challenge of communicating with houseless individuals to promote safety.
- Grade-crossing incidents for vehicles have decreased, but a growing concern is the increase in pedestrian incidents.
- Two incidents involved bicycles.
- Multiple incidents occurred in quiet zones.
- Planning is critical.
- Railroads are seen as adversaries in community planning when they resist certain projects, until there is a fatality. It is imperative to understand the ramifications of the location regarding the potential for tragedy that could occur.

Chris Malm will take steps to pass along info and action steps to prepare for a rail crossing elimination grant next fall. Projects do not necessarily have to be shovel ready.

Connect Oregon and Policy Plan Update

- The Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) approved around \$48 million dollars of Connect Oregon funds allocated by the RAC for projects.

RAC Meeting Notes 12-17-2024

- Most applicants have returned their Connect Oregon Grant Agreements.
- Based on current projections, the next round of Connect Oregon funding will take place in a year at the earliest.
- The OTC authorized a new temporary rule to allow Connect Oregon funds to be used as a match source for federal funding for applicants. The administrative rules were adopted in December and the program is now live and works as follows:
 - Any entity that is interested in applying for Connect Oregon funds to use as a federal match must apply well before the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) becomes available.
 - Applications and instructions are available on the [Connect Oregon website](#).
 - Applicants reach out to ODOT to apply for Connect Oregon matching funds for federal grant applications.
 - ODOT will internally review and if ODOT staff recommend the application should move forward, then the application will be brought to the RAC to make a recommendation to the OTC.
 - OTC will make the final decision on whether the project should move forward.
 - If the application is unsuccessful the allocated match goes back into the Connect Oregon fund.
- The review of these applications will have to be completed off schedule and committee review done remotely.
- A new challenge will be managing Connect Oregon cash flows for both the Connect Oregon and federal grant match programs.
- A challenge with this process is there could be a significant number of applications and there may not be enough funding to fund these projects.
- This program will be selective when funds are available.
- \$10-\$15 million dollars of Connect Oregon funds will be used for this program.
- Connect Oregon funding can be the entirety of a match, but an application could score higher by committees if Connect Oregon funding is only a portion of the match, and applicants demonstrate they can provide some funding for the project.

Oregon State Rail Plan

- ODOT is working to update the [state rail plan website](#).
- ODOT has been conducting interviews with interested parties over the last two months.
- Interviews will be completed by February 2025.
- ODOT will release a public survey to engage stakeholders to obtain input regarding updates to the state rail plan.
- ODOT is coordinating with Bob Melbo, ODOT's State Rail Planner, and Chris Malm to rank at-grade highway rail crossings. These data will be used to update the safety action plan of at-grade highway rail crossings and to rank potential grant applications.
- ODOT is analyzing freight rail travel flows to determine trends in commodities, specifically decreasing commodities over time so that there is historical context for strategic improvements to rail freight activity in the state.
- ODOT analyzes intercity passenger rail ridership growth given the record-breaking ridership numbers in 2024.
- The Amtrak Cascades service is seeing the highest ridership in the state's history.
- ODOT is working to update the high-speed rail concept vision report. The vision report analyzes a high-speed rail section from Portland to Eugene. The report will be released later this month.

Legislative Update

- The Oregon Legislative Road Show Tour saw many legislators show interest in rail.
- ODOT provided information to legislative transportation funding work groups.
- Several presentations on rail were provided to the Public Transportation working group.
- In December, Governor Kotek released the 2025-2027 Governor's Recommended Budget which recommended the Legislature allocate \$7,298,788,718 to ODOT for the 2025-2027 biennium an increase of \$968,832,744 from the 2023-2025 biennium.

- No specific investments for rail are in the governor's budget.
- Senator Khan Pham is aiming to introduce a bill to establish a new state rail agency this session.
- HB 4109 directed ODOT to work with the State of Idaho to study expanding the Amtrak Pioneer route. This report will be released by ODOT by December 31st.

Federal Grants

- ODOT applied for a federal Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements (CRISI) Program grant for increased planning efforts for Oregon rail projects but was denied. ODOT is planning to meet with the FRA to understand why the CRISI grant was not awarded and to help make future applications stronger.
- On December 16th ODOT submitted two grant applications for the FRA Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail (FSP) Grants:
 - Willbridge Crossover:
 - Replaces number 11 turnouts with number 20 turnouts allowing for increased switching speeds of 35 MPH instead of 10 MPH on any track.
 - Eugene Layover Tracks: Construct a new additional layover track which will allow for the detrainning and entraining of passengers and will eliminate a non-revenue round trip to the Union Pacific (UP) yard that is required due to multiple passenger and freight trains needing to use the current siding.
- Potential Grant for 2025 Union Station Rehabilitation:
 - ODOT will assess federal grant opportunities to apply for Union Station improvements. ODOT is working with Prosper Portland to potentially apply for a CRISI grant in 2025 for Union Station improvements.
 - Some estimates state that around 200 million dollars may be needed for improvements to Union Station.

Quarterly Updates

- Public Transportation Division:
 - ODOT has been reporting a lot to the legislature and has presented to workgroups about the rail needs of the state and the potential costs of projects and investments.
 - ODOT has developed cost estimates for implementing the 2021 Service Development Plan. The cost estimates include increased maintenance cost estimates, cost estimates for acquiring new Airo equipment in 2026, and project investment costs. The annual capital project investment estimate for needed projects is around \$135 million dollars per year. This includes the full project costs. ODOT will pursue obtaining federal grant funding to cover most of the project costs.

RAC Membership Refresh:

- ODOT is working to fill membership positions for the RAC that have recently been vacated.
- ODOT is working to establish standards across all public transit advisory committees. This will include standardized procedures for meetings and membership refresh processes.
- The RAC is in danger of not being able to hold a meeting due to the lack of members.
- ODOT is requesting from the RAC contacts for different rail-related unions in the hope of finding potential RAC members.
- Chris Myron to develop a list of contacts from rail-related unions.
- ODOT is also in touch with SMART Unions per the vacancy left by Glen Carrey.

Passenger Rail:

- Ridership for passenger rail is at the highest level in the service's history.
- Gas prices and marketing efforts have played a role in the increase in ridership.
- On-time performance for the Amtrak Cascades service is improving; however, ODOT recognizes improvements are needed.

- The Mt. Bachelor trainset was involved in a crash involving a downed tree fouling the tracks. After the insurance clears ODOT estimates they are still \$250,000 over budget for repairs.
- 73 percent of delays for September to November were caused by host railroad related delays. This is roughly a 10 percent decrease since the last RAC meeting.
- Ridership was down in October compared to September, but ODOT recognizes this is a regular trend as individuals gear up for the holiday season.

High-Speed Rail

- On November 19th a meeting was held in Portland at the end of the Cascadia Innovation Corridor Housing Conference, where key officials and the governor discussed high-speed rail in the Cascadia area. The key outcome of this meeting was that there is universal support from the governor and key officials to continue moving forward.
- The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is working with FRA to advance the Cascadia HSR project into Step 2 of the CID Program.
- Step 2 will require a corridor-wide Service Development Plan which WSDOT estimates will take about 4 years to complete.
- WSDOT has submitted a scope, schedule, and budget to the FRA and are currently waiting to hear back.
- The project is in its preliminary stages of planning and alignment and station locations have not been identified.
- ODOT and the B.C. Ministry of Transportation continue to engage as jurisdictional partners in the project.

Amtrak Cascades Corridor Modeling

- ODOT and consultant team are meeting with the FRA and UP monthly to review freight and passenger rail traffic simulation modeling. We have completed the No Action Case 2 which documents freight rail growth with no infrastructure changes to the corridor. We have also completed Case 3 which looks at a minimum growth alternative and examines needed infrastructure improvements which includes Case 3A which discusses freight rail growth but not passenger rail growth and Case 3B which discusses passenger rail growth but no freight rail growth. Case 3C is underway which looks at both passenger and freight rail growth.
- In November, ODOT put together a preliminary list of projects that have been developed and tested for these scenarios. This list of projects is currently being tested under Case 3C.
- ODOT and consultant will be meeting with UP staff in mid-December to confirm some of the modeling progress to date.
- ODOT and consultant are conducting a Union Station Capacity Analysis. This analysis will ensure there is enough space for the Amtrak Cascades in the future to and through the Portland Union Station rail hub which includes Empire Builder and Coast Starlight services in a full build-out situation. As part of this analysis ODOT expects to document track and platform occupancy for a full buildout scenario. This work has not been done to date.
- Quarter 1 of 2025 will bring the results of Case 3C. We will be doing some randomized analysis on the network to be sure there is significant resilience on the improvements being proposed.
- ODOT will work to identify whether additional infrastructure improvements are needed.
- After this work's completion ODOT will put together a refined phasing plan for a logical sequence of infrastructure improvements in the network.
- This will put Oregon in a better position to seek funding through the FRA, CID, and FSP programs.

Amtrak Daily Long-Distance Survey Study

- The FRA long-Distance Survey Study was launched in late 2022. FRA hopes to have a report to congress by Spring 2025.
- FRA identified 15 preferred routes to add to the Amtrak long distance network. One of those routes, the North Coast Hiawatha, received corridor status on its own and was removed from the list.

- One of these routes is the Pioneer route traveling from Denver to Seattle through Oregon.
 - The Pioneer route ranked 13 out of 14 of the preferred routes. This route could be ranked higher in other subjective evaluations that focus on different factors such as elected official support.
 - The Pioneer is estimated to cost between \$2 billion and \$2.7 billion dollars. The Pioneer route is estimated to be a 40-hour one-way trip. Costs are hard to justify restoring this service unless the ridership numbers are estimated to be extremely high.
 - The Pioneer route would serve 29 train stations, an additional 1.6 million individuals, and would stop in eight cities that do not currently have passenger rail service.
 - The main portion of the route that already does not have long distance service would be from Portland Oregon to Salt Lake City Utah.

Freight Rail Industry

- Freight rail business is up about 3.3 percent in the United States over the same period in 2023. In Mexico business is up 0.9 percent and in Canada business is down 1 percent.
- Freight carloads are up in chemicals, grain, and miscellaneous carloads.
- Freight carloads are down about 13 percent in areas such as coal, motor vehicles, and motor vehicle parts.
- Non-metallic materials are down 3.3 percent.
- The first two quarters for BNSF were down, however the third quarter saw a rebound. BNSF saw the most volume in September since 2021. BNSF saw record levels of performance and velocity.
- UP has had a similar year to BNSF in terms of carloads and quarter performance.
- Shortlines are very diverse from a carload perspective.
- Genesee and Wyoming Inc. (GNW) and UP came to an agreement to allow for Eugene Yard to be controlled by GNW. It is expected GNW will take over the yard by spring of 2025.
- Last year was the freight recession year, however this year has seen a rebound.
- This was a record year from GNW in terms of investing in the railroads.
- Goose Lake Railway (GLR) has seen similar trends to BNSF and UP. GLR is hoping an agreement with the FRA will be executed soon for a project on the Goose Lake Railway.
- The Central Oregon Pacific and Portland and Western Connect Oregon agreements have been signed, and work will kick off in the next two to three months.

Public Comments

- Doug Allen asked about as part of the modeling Case 3C what is the estimated round trips and when the modeling will take place? Andrew Mortensen answered that the modeling will be done around mid-spring in the hopes of advancing projects into final design stages. Modeling is testing an additional 2 and 4 round trips from Seattle to Portland. This consistent with what was identified in the 2021 Service Development Plan.

Agenda Build

- Next meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2025, in Salem Oregon. The meeting will not take place in the Mill Creek Building as usual due to the move of the public transportation division of ODOT to the Transportation Building. The meeting will take place in the Transportation Building.
- Next meeting will be in the middle of the 2025 legislative session which will provide some unique topics.
- Chris Malm will make sure his replacement attends the next meeting.

Closing Comments

- Thanks to Chris Malm for his contribution to the rail industry in Oregon.
- Chairman Carswell recognizes Chris's service to the Oregon rail system.
- Meeting was adjourned at 11:33 A.M.