

WSDOT Rail Update

Supporting the movement of
freight and passengers

Washington State Transportation Commission

Jason Biggs | Director
WSDOT Rail, Freight and Ports Division

January 14, 2025

Rail network in Washington



- 2 Class I railroads (BNSF and Union Pacific)
- 27 Class III short-line railroads
- 1,900 miles of Class I railroads and 1,300 miles of short-line railroads
- PCC system, owned by WSDOT, largest short-line in the state - 297 miles

Operation of PCC short-line railroad



PCC key to grain delivery

- A key component in Washington's wheat delivery supply chain
- Primarily moves wheat to main line train routes and barges
- Grain usually travels to ports for export, primarily to Asia
- In 2023, Washington state produced 3.2 million metric tons of wheat
- About 20-25% of Washington's wheat historically shipped on the PCC system
- Shippers use rail because grain can be moved from one of the PCC's Grain Terminals to a Port in 24 to 48 hours at competitive shipping rates



PCC strategic goals and funding

- WSDOT's PCC Strategic Plan and State Rail Plan include the need for track and signal modernization, weight limit increases, increased speeds, and improved resiliency
- Legislature identified allocations of \$6.7 million through Connecting Washington every two years through 2031 for the PCC system
- PCC system allocated an additional \$150 million for capital improvements through Move Ahead Washington funds in 2021 Transportation budget
- Since 2012, private investments in the PCC have exceeded \$80 million



Federal investments

Highly successful in obtaining competitive grants

- Over the last 15 years, WSDOT Rail, Freight and Ports Division received 22 of the 25 federal grants applied for – a total of \$1.5 billion in federal funding for improvements to both freight and passenger rail

Recent federal grants for PCC

- In 2020, \$5.6 million federal BUILD grant matched with \$5.6 million in state Connecting Washington funds (work completed in 2021)
- In 2022, \$72.8 million in federal CRISI grant matched by \$39.2 million in state, local and private funds, for a total project budget of \$112 million



Passenger rail

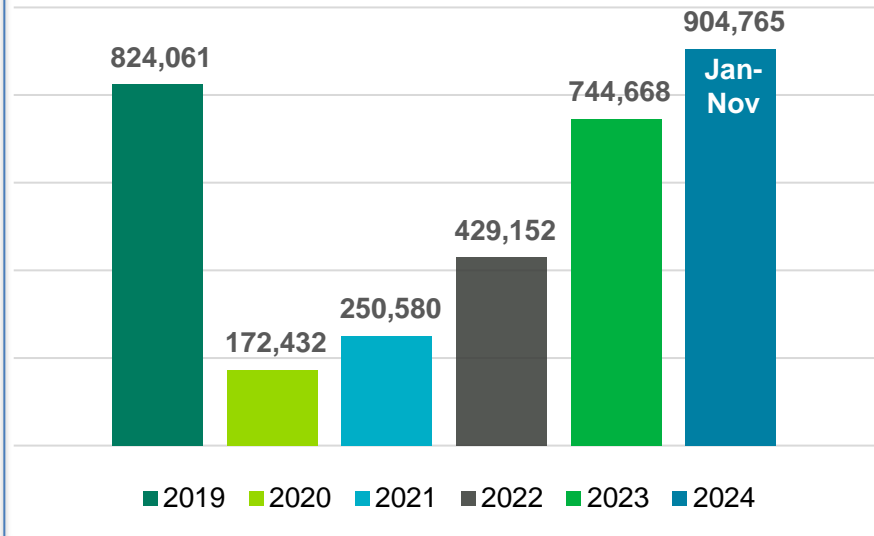
Amtrak Cascades service

- 18 stations from Vancouver, BC to Eugene, Oregon covering 461 miles
- Current daily roundtrips:
 - Two between Seattle and Vancouver, BC
 - Six between Seattle and Portland
 - Two between Portland and Eugene
- WSDOT and ODOT contract with Amtrak to operate the service
- As a federally designated Intercity Passenger Rail service, states pay for operating costs not covered by ticket sales
- Amtrak operates on BNSF and Sound Transit tracks in Washington and Union Pacific tracks in Oregon



Ridership and revenue increasing

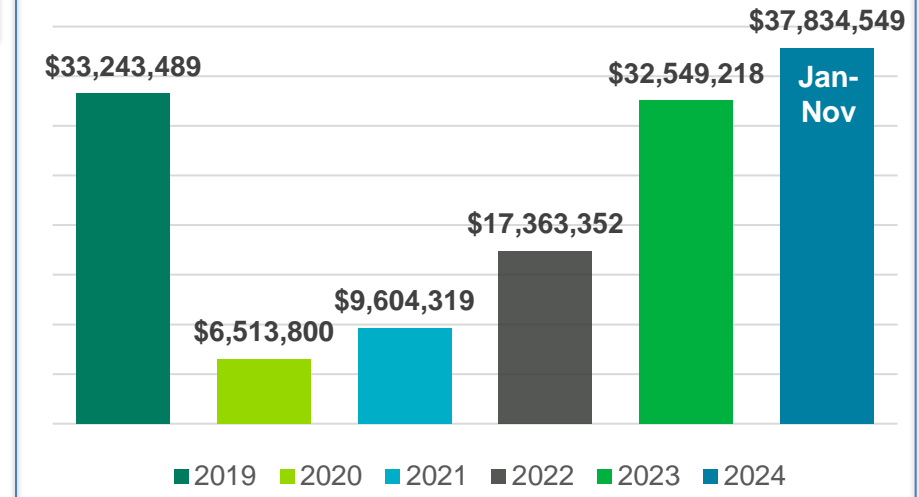
**Amtrak Cascades
Annual Ridership Comparison**



Ridership

- Preliminary numbers for 2024 show record high levels – exceeding 2019 ridership
- Anticipate one million riders in 2025

**Amtrak Cascades
Annual Revenue Comparison**



Revenue

- Record high ridership and adjustments to the fare structure led to higher revenue in 2024
- Ticket sales now pay for 60% of operating costs

Free youth fare in Washington state



- Passengers aged 18 and under now ride free on Amtrak Cascades trains in Washington
- First announced on May 28, 2024
- More than 17,000 youth participated from May-Oct 2024
- Legislature passed requirement in 2022 for all transit, ferries, and Amtrak Cascades trains to offer free fares
- Part of state's Climate Commitment Act
- Educating future generations to consider trains and transit as great travel choices



Current construction projects

Salmon Bay Bridge

- WSDOT awarded \$25 million federal INFRA grant to rehabilitate the Salmon Bay Bridge, north of Seattle over the Ballard locks
- BNSF Railway funding remainder of the \$110 million project
- Serves Amtrak Cascades, Amtrak's long-distance Empire Builder and Sound Transit's Sounder trains



Landslide mitigation

- Leveraged \$4.5 million in state funds into more than \$12 million total project funding through the federal grants and BNSF Railway contributions
- WSDOT awarded three separate CRISI grants from FRA
- WSDOT administers the grants and BNSF Railway undertakes the work to install catchment walls and slope stabilization



Trackside equipment

- In 2024, awarded \$6.45 million CRISI grant to upgrade railroad switches between Everett and Vancouver, WA



Preclearance at Pacific Central Station

Customs preclearance between Canada and United States

- Construction at station to accommodate onsite customs clearance
- Funding for improvements will be paid from ticket surcharge revenues being charged to passengers traveling to and from the station
- VIA Rail contracting for construction, with costs paid through Amtrak
- Will eliminate need for southbound trains to stop in Blaine for U.S. Customs agents to board the train to check passengers
- Will save 10 minutes in travel time between Vancouver, BC and Seattle
- Targeting Spring 2025 for implementation



New trainsets in 2026



- Eight new trainsets and two new locomotives
- Part of Amtrak's national procurement, funded through the federal IIJA infrastructure package
- Manufactured by Siemens in the United States
- Cascades first to be delivered by Siemens, with trains for routes in eastern U.S. following
- Each train seats 300 passengers
- More fuel efficient and produce significantly less air pollution
- Designed for comfort, with amenities for onboard work or enjoyment
- Revenue service in 2026



Promoting cross-border travel

2026 World Cup in Seattle and Vancouver, BC

- Total of 13 matches occurring in both cities between June 13 and July 7, 2026
- Preparing for major transportation impacts with Amtrak, FIFA Planning Committee, and other WSDOT divisions
- Exploring adding more trains, buses or additional seating to transport spectators between the cities
- Opportunity to make Amtrak Cascades a transportation option during this international event and promote ongoing train travel between the two countries



Future planning

Amtrak Cascades Service Development Plan

- WSDOT and ODOT are developing a blueprint for future capital improvements and service changes for Amtrak Cascades
- WSDOT completed a Preliminary Service Development Plan for segments of the corridor under its purview
- Through FRA's Corridor Identification and Development program, awarded \$500,000 in federal funding in December 2023
- Additional funding available for future planning and construction
- Coordinate with other modal planning efforts and sponsor agencies



- Next step is to develop more detailed analysis of service options, needed capital improvements, costs, and a phased implementation plan
- Several upcoming opportunities for input, communication, and coordination on longer-term service frequencies and customer / operational improvements

Potentially resuming long-distance service in Washington

FRA study of discontinued long-distance routes

- FRA concluded its feasibility study of restoring long-distance train services that Amtrak stopped operating in the 1980s
- WSDOT participated in the study's Northwest Working Group
- Part of the analysis looked at train service in the Pacific Northwest that included the North Coast Hiawatha route that once connected Seattle to Ellensburg, Yakima, Pasco and Spokane – before continuing to Chicago, however, that route was removed from the study as FRA advanced it into the Corridor ID program.
- Seattle to Denver was also identified, but ranked low on FRA's Initial Rating by Preferred Routes

Big Sky North Coast route

- Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority in Montana awarded \$500,000 under FRA's Corridor ID program to further study the former North Coast Hiawatha route
- Scoping efforts underway
- WSDOT coordinating with Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority

Information

For more information, please contact:

Jason Biggs, PE

Director

Rail, Freight and Ports Division

Jason.Biggs@wsdot.wa.gov

360-705-6902