



Oregon

Tina Kotek, Governor

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DATE: February 4, 2025

TO: Joint Committee on Transportation

FROM: Suzanne Carlson – Administrator
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SUBJECT: House Bill 3233 – Cascades Rail Corridor

INTRODUCTION

HB 3233 directs ODOT to work with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (BCMoTI) to develop a shared regional approach to planning, funding, and communications for the Cascades Rail Corridor and freight rail and infrastructure. The measure requires ODOT to submit a biennial report to the legislature on the status of agreements and other subjects pertinent to the corridor.

BACKGROUND

Oregon and Washington have been working together since 1995 to coordinate passenger rail efforts. As a result of the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act (PRIIA), the states have been operating the Amtrak Cascades service collaboratively as one corridor.

The Amtrak Cascades operates from Eugene, Oregon to Vancouver, BC. The State of Oregon is responsible for managing the Amtrak Cascades service operations in the vast majority of Oregon, and Washington State is responsible from north of Portland, Oregon. The service is operated by Amtrak and operates over privately owned infrastructure.

Last year, Oregon's rail ridership was 164,660, exceeding the previous 2012 record by 20 percent. The Amtrak Cascades Corridor had the highest ridership growth of all state supported services in 2024, with a 27 percent growth in ridership. This was attributed to the addition of two roundtrips between Portland and Seattle, providing more options and improving connectivity in Oregon. Ridership was supported by simplified fare structures, service enhancements, and marketing efforts by ODOT and WSDOT.

The 2013 Legislature passed [HB 2918](#), directing ODOT partner with WSDOT and BCMoTI to develop a shared approach to passenger rail planning, development, funding, and communication. HB 2918 also required ODOT to provide a passenger rail status report to the Legislative Assembly every other odd-numbered year. The 2025 [Passenger Rail Report](#) was provided on December 31, 2024.

DISCUSSION

Rail is a critical component of a safe, efficient, and accessible multimodal transportation system. ODOT appreciates the legislature's thoughtfulness in bringing ODOT, WSDOT, and BCMoTI together to work towards advancing connectivity and services across the Pacific Northwest.

Since the 2013 implementation of PRIIA, Oregon and Washington have worked closely to operate the Amtrak Cascades corridor, meet regularly to discuss ways to improve the service, and partner for federal grant applications. Furthermore, ODOT and WSDOT are working together to ensure the Service Development Plans (SDP) are in alignment to improve the Amtrak Cascades corridor, which was admitted into the new Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) Corridor Identification and Development Program (CID Program) in December 2023.

HB 3233 aligns with ODOT, WSDOT, and BCMoTI's efforts with the directive to develop a plan on the shared vision and goal for passenger rail. The measure also expands ODOT's reporting requirements directed in HB 2918 for the Passenger Rail Report. HB 2918 directed ODOT to report on the status of agreements with WSDOT and BCMoTI regarding the Corridor; the performance of passenger rail service within the Corridor; and the financial status of the Corridor and financial needs for passenger rail service within the Corridor. HB 3233 expands the HB 2918 report to include freight rail and infrastructure improvements with WSDOT and BCMoTI.

Furthermore, the 2015 Legislature directed ODOT to develop a Passenger Rail Plan and submit quarterly reports to the Legislature on even number years with the passage of [HB 3401](#). The report includes information on ridership and efforts to increase ridership. The accompanying proposed measure, [HB 3231](#) (2025 Session), expands the existing report directed in HB 3401 to include a biennial report that covers marketing strategy, strategies for boosting ridership, strategies for boosting capacity, strategies for upgrading and improving railroad track and related infrastructure, and information about federal rail infrastructure grant applications.

The existing reporting requirements in HB 2918 and HB 3401, and the reporting requirements in proposed measures HB 3231 and HB 3233, create some duplicate reporting requirements with opposing reporting cycles. To streamline efforts, increase efficiency, institute consistency, and maximize resources, ODOT offers for consideration, the Legislature consolidate the existing report (HB 2918) and new proposed reports directed HB 3233 and HB 3231, into one comprehensive biennial report.

By combining the existing and proposed reporting requirements, ODOT would be able to provide one comprehensive, biannual report to the Legislature capturing the following information:

- The status of agreements with WSDOT and BCMoTI regarding the Cascades Rail Corridor.
- The performance of passenger rail service within the Cascades Rail Corridor.
- The financial status of the Corridor and financial needs for passenger rail service within the Cascades Rail Corridor.
- The shared vision, goals and objectives for passenger rail service and freight rail service within the Cascades Rail Corridor. *(new)*

- Plan to achieve performance goals, manage fleet assets, share costs, prioritize investments, improve infrastructure and resolve interagency disputes within the Cascades Rail Corridor. *(new)*
- Proposals for funding options to support the infrastructure improvements and operation of passenger and freight trains within the Cascades Rail Corridor. *(new)*
- Development of federal funding applications consistent with the shared plans within the Cascades Rail Corridor. *(new)*
- Oregon's Passenger Rail Plan, including:
 - o A marketing strategy for passenger rail in Oregon.
 - o Strategies to boost ridership for passenger rail in Oregon.
 - o Strategies for boosting tourism with passenger rail in Oregon.
 - o Strategies for boosting capacity for passenger rail in Oregon. *(new)*
 - o Strategies for upgrading and improving railroad track and related infrastructure.
 - o Status of federal rail infrastructure grant applications. *(new)*

With one biennial report, ODOT will be able to provide more comprehensive information and maximize reporting efforts with efficiency while streamlining resources, and policy makers will have a one-stop shop document – telling the full story of passenger rail in Oregon and the Cascades Rail Corridor.

CONCLUSION

HB 3233 accentuates the on-going partnership with WSDOT and BCMoTI to develop a shared regional approach for the Cascades Rail Corridor and freight rail and infrastructure. The measure requires ODOT to submit a biennial report to the Legislature on the status of these efforts. To streamline efforts, increase efficiency, and maximize resources, ODOT offers for consideration, the Legislature consolidates existing reporting requirements and proposed reporting requirements into one biannual report to provide more comprehensive information for policy makers and to streamline the Department's resources.