
Rail

Overview and Table of Contents

This section provides information about rail and high capacity transportation used in or being planned for the state. High capacity transportation systems may include heavy, light, or commuter rail, but also may include other elements such as exclusive busways.

RAIL	379
Overview and Table of Contents.....	379
Freight Rail	380
Washington State Rail System Map.....	381
High Capacity Transportation (HCT) System Development	382
Intercity Passenger Rail (AMTRAK).....	384

Freight Rail

BACKGROUND

- There are two Class I railroads operating in Washington State: the BNSF Railway Company and the Union Pacific (UP) Railroad.
- Several smaller short-line railroads operate within the state. These railroads serve local shippers and communities with links to the large Class I railroads. The following rail companies operate short-line railroads in Washington: *Eastern Washington* – Great Northwest, Palouse River and Coulee City, Kettle Falls International, Pend Oreille Valley, Eastern Washington Gateway, Western Rail, and Washington & Idaho; *Central Washington* – Tri-City and Olympia, Columbia River and Cascade, Columbia Basin, and Central Washington; *Western Washington* – Columbia and Cowlitz, Tacoma Rail Mountain Division, Puget Sound and Pacific, Portland Vancouver Junction, Meeker Southern, Ballard Terminal, and several switching railroads.
- Public ownership of short-line infrastructure has grown over the last several decades. The Palouse River and Coulee City, Western Rail, Eastern Washington Gateway, Washington & Idaho, Tri-City and Olympia, Central Washington, Pend Oreille Valley, and Tacoma Rail operate on rail infrastructure owned by the state, a county, or a Port Authority.
- Potential significance of freight rail to Washington State’s economy:
 - Increases seaport capacity by providing a means to quickly and efficiently move inbound containers from port areas to distant inland destinations.
 - Provides an effective and economical means to move agricultural and industrial goods produced in Washington to distant market destinations.
 - Encourages competition among modes in certain circumstances to keep freight rates reasonable.
 - Reduces long-haul truck traffic on state's highways, reducing highway preservation costs and congestion in some circumstances.
 - Supports Washington businesses and economic development
 - Provides an energy-efficient transportation mode with a smaller environmental impact.

GOVERNANCE

- WSDOT is responsible for developing and implementing Washington State’s rail plan and programs.

FUNDING

The following state funding sources are available for freight rail:

- Freight Rail Assistance Program:
 - Low-interest loans and grants that provide financial assistance to cities, counties, and ports, to preserve existing light density rail lines and service.
 - Rail assistance loans and grants can provide effective job creation tools for the state and local communities; availability of rail service is sometimes mandatory when a community competes for new family-wage industries.
 - Loans and grants to cities, counties, or ports to purchase rail corridors, including trackage, for future freight rail service (rail banking).
 - In addition, the state may purchase a line for future rail use (rail banking).
- Freight Rail Investment Bank Program
 - The purposes are the same as for the projects funded under the Freight Rail Assistance Program.
 - Only public agencies can apply for the loans.

The Legislature allocates an amount for each biennium; WSDOT issues a call for projects for evaluation and submission for legislative consideration.



High Capacity Transportation (HCT) System Development

BACKGROUND

- Transit modes that operate primarily on exclusive rights of way.
- Includes light rail (e.g., Portland's MAX system), heavy rail (e.g., BART in the Bay Area), commuter rail (e.g., West Coast Express in Vancouver, BC and Caltrain in the Bay Area), monorail (e.g., Las Vegas and Disney World), and exclusive busways (e.g., Los Angeles, Pittsburgh or Ottawa).
- Provides a substantially higher level of passenger capacity, speed, and service frequency than traditional urban public transportation systems.
- Currently, the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA, known as Sound Transit), covering most of King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties, is the major operator of HCT system elements in Washington. Commuter rail service (Sounder) began in 2000. Light rail service in Tacoma began in 2003. The Central Link light rail project, connecting downtown Seattle, the Rainier Valley, Tukwila and SeaTac Airport is nearing completion, with testing of light rail vehicles underway. The line will open in July 2009 to Tukwila and in December 2009 to the airport. The City of Seattle operates the Seattle Center Monorail, a legacy of the 1962 World's Fair. HCT options are being considered as part of the Columbia River Crossing (CRC) project connecting Vancouver, WA and Portland, OR.

GOVERNANCE

- The RTA (Sound Transit) will develop and operate the HCT system in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Voters approved the RTA financing plan in November 1996. The regional plan, called Sound Move, includes commuter rail service between Everett and Seattle and Tacoma and Seattle: Tacoma Link light rail and Central Link light rail, connecting downtown Seattle, Tukwila, and SeaTac International Airport. Central Link will be completed in 2009.
- The Joint Regional Planning Committee (JRPC) was an organization of 20 elected officials and WSDOT representatives, which was formed by interlocal agreement and planned a public transportation system for the central Puget Sound region. The JRPC was succeeded by the RTA, which is governed by a board composed of elected officials from Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties and the Washington State Secretary of Transportation.
- In areas outside central Puget Sound, joint regional planning committees direct the planning for HCT systems.

FUNDING

- In addition to the RTA (Sound Transit), transit districts in Thurston, Clark, Yakima, and Spokane counties are authorized to levy voter-approved taxes for high capacity transportation systems (RCW 81.100.030, 81.100.060):
 - Employer tax of up to \$2 per employee per month
 - Local option motor vehicle excise tax of up to 0.8%, except on large trucks (repealed by I-776)
 - Sales and use tax of up to 1% (limited to 0.9% if 0.1% sales tax for criminal justice has been imposed in county)
 - Federal grant funds may also be used by transit districts (Sound Transit has received a \$500 million grant to assist in construction of Central Link and anticipates receipt of an additional \$750 million for University Link in 2007 or 2008).
- The RTA (Sound Transit) funding plan, approved by voters in November 1996, includes 0.4% sales and use tax and 0.3% motor vehicle excise tax (repealed by I-776).

- HCT taxes may be used for planning, constructing, and operating high capacity transportation systems, including commuter rail and feeder transportation systems.
- Provides up to 80% state match from High Capacity Transportation Account for high capacity transportation planning.
- Revenue from the following local option taxes authorized in 1990 (Chapter 42, Laws of 1990) may also be used for HCT systems (RCW 82.80.020, 82.80.030):
 - License fee
 - Commercial parking tax

Intercity Passenger Rail (AMTRAK)

BACKGROUND

- The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is developing a high-speed rail passenger program in the state to accommodate increasing intercity travel demands. The Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor from Vancouver, B.C. to Eugene, OR was originally designated under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991 as one of five nationally designated corridors to be developed for high-speed rail passenger service.
- Ridership on WSDOT/Oregon DOT/Amtrak-sponsored service in the Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor (Amtrak *Cascades*) has risen from 94,000 in 1994 to over 676,000 in 2007.
- National Railroad Passenger Corporation (also known as Amtrak) was formed by Congress in 1970 to operate rail passenger service.
- Amtrak provides intercity passenger service in Western Washington with connections to Central Washington, Eastern Washington, the Midwest, and California destinations, with total passenger volumes at Washington Amtrak stations exceeding 1,186,000 in 2007.
- Operates on over 900 miles of BNSF Railway track in the state and provides service to 17 cities. Three statewide corridors provide service between Vancouver, B.C. and Portland, OR; Seattle and Spokane; and Portland, OR and Spokane.

GOVERNANCE

- WSDOT is responsible for developing and implementing Washington State's passenger rail program as specified in RCW 47.79 and 47.82.

FUNDING

Funding for intercity rail passenger rail activities is provided by the following sources:

Multimodal Account – State

- The 2007-2009 transportation budget as supplemented in the 2008 Legislative session included an appropriation of \$181.06 million from the Multimodal Transportation Account – State, to carry out the following activities:
 - Operate two daily round trips between Seattle and Portland; one daily round trip between Seattle and Vancouver, B.C.; and one daily roundtrip between Portland and Bellingham.
 - Extend the rail siding at Mount Vernon; realign curves and provide yard tracks in Everett; make track, signal, and bridge improvements in Vancouver; construct the first phase of improvements on bypass of Point Defiance in conjunction with Sound Transit; rescope phases of the Kelso-Martin Bluff project. These projects will create faster and higher-capacity infrastructure to further the corridor passenger program.

- Complete a crossover project at Tenino to enhance service reliability of existing and future service.
- Construct a new Amtrak *Cascades* station at Stanwood; upgrade and extend the siding at Stanwood.
- Improve track and signal system in conjunction with Sound Transit to improve access to King Street Station.

Multimodal Account – Federal and Local

- \$19.6 million in federal funds from the Multimodal Account in 2007-2009 were appropriated for:
 - Construction of track improvements near Blaine to facilitate train movements around the Customs inspection facility.
 - Design and construction of a roadway bridge in Vancouver, WA as part of the Vancouver Rail Project.
 - Construction of first phase of improvements on bypass of Point Defiance in conjunction with Sound Transit.
 - Improve safety at grade crossings under Section 1103(f) corridor hazard elimination program.
- WSDOT receives no federal funds for support of rail passenger operations.
- WSDOT applied for up to \$6 million grant from the FRA \$30 million available nationwide in 2008. Announcements of the awarded grants are not expected until October 2008. Congress has been considering a variety of additional proposals for several years.
- WSDOT receives federal funds from the Federal Highways Administration for grade crossing improvements and from the Federal Transit Administration for station improvements.

