



## **Purpose and Need Statement** *(January 9, 2013)*

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### **Purpose**

The purpose of the Oregon Passenger Rail Project is to improve the frequency, convenience, speed and reliability of passenger rail service along the Oregon segment of the federally-designated Pacific Northwest Rail Corridor (PNWRC) in a manner that will:

- Provide riders with an efficient, safe, equitable and affordable alternative to highway, bus, and air travel;
- Be a cost-effective investment;
- Protect freight-rail carrying capability<sup>1</sup>;
- Support the ongoing implementation of regional high speed inter-city passenger rail in the PNWRC between the Eugene-Springfield metropolitan area and Vancouver, British Columbia;
- Be compatible with the Washington State portion of the PNWRC;
- Promote economic development;
- Avoid or minimize community and environmental impacts; and
- Integrate with existing and planned multi-modal transportation networks.

### **Need**

Multiple transportation, land use, socio-economic, and environmental considerations drive the need for this project, including:

- **Increasing Intercity and Regional Travel Demands**

Eight of the ten largest cities in Oregon are along the corridor, including the state's three largest metropolitan areas of Portland, Salem-Keizer, and Eugene-Springfield. Willamette Valley population growth has increased intercity and regional travel demands, resulting in decreased highway mobility and increased demand for alternative travel modes including rail for business, personal, and tourist travel. Passenger rail ridership on the existing state-sponsored Cascade service between Portland and Eugene (that also serves stations in Oregon City, Salem, and Albany) has increased 22 percent since 2009 and by 238 percent

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<sup>1</sup> Cargo load that can be transported by freight-rail.

since 1995, and is forecast to continue to increase with Willamette Valley population growth. Over the next 25 years, the population of the Willamette Valley is forecast to grow by approximately 35 percent, with an overall population reaching approximately 3.6 million by the year 2035. During this same period, freight volume (carried by both trains and trucks) in Oregon is expected to grow by approximately 60 percent. The increase in both freight and passenger rail demand creates a need for rail infrastructure investment.

- **Limited Rail System Capacity and Competing Service Needs**

Freight and passenger rail between Eugene and Portland have competing service needs in a corridor with limited rail system capacity. Forecast growth places added burden on the existing rail network to move both people and freight. Currently, passenger trains between Union Station in Portland and Eugene have operating rights on Union Pacific Railroad owned tracks. BNSF Railway owns the railroad tracks in the congested corridor between Union Station in Portland and Washington State.

Scheduled end-to-end passenger rail travel time between the Eugene Depot and Portland's Union Station averaged 2 hours and 40 minutes (not including delay) in 2012, approximately 40 minutes longer than the time it takes to travel the same distance in a passenger vehicle. From 2006 through 2011, passenger trains in the corridor were on time an average of approximately 65 percent of the time. Current train delay ratios in this corridor are similar to the conditions for much larger and denser rail systems. Existing freight rail capacity must be preserved or enhanced to be consistent with statewide and regional freight goals and forecasts. New capital investments will help alleviate existing capacity issues and create opportunities for improved freight and passenger rail operations.

- **Declining State and Local Roadway Funding**

Declining state and local roadway funding will limit the ability to fund roadway capacity projects to improve mobility. Oregon's funding outlook for financing roadway improvements is severely constrained due to lower gas tax revenue (primarily from the trend of more fuel efficient vehicles and lower vehicles miles traveled), and Oregon's repayment of bonds from recent critical transportation infrastructure improvements which reduces the funding available for future projects. Communities within the state are looking beyond roadway projects towards other types of transportation projects to leverage available funding sources for non-roadway projects to improve mobility and to provide an interconnected multimodal system that serves both regional and local networks.

- **Increase Economic Vitality of the Corridor**

Increasingly congested highways and rail corridors have negative effects on the economy of communities in the Willamette Valley. Transportation investments are needed to reduce travel delay and improve economic market access and competitiveness. With declining state and local roadway funding, rail infrastructure investments can reduce congestion's effect on the economic vitality of the corridor. Rail infrastructure investments with improved passenger rail operations and improved infrastructure for freight operations will improve market access within the corridor for individuals and goods, and will improve the economic competitiveness of the communities within the Willamette Valley and Oregon as a whole.

- **Promoting Transportation System Safety and Security**

Stability and security of both rail passengers and the surface transportation system within the corridor can be bolstered by providing viable alternatives to highway travel. Per passenger mile traveled, rail has historically had lower fatality rates than highway travel. If there is a major accident or prolonged disruption to travel on Interstate 5, travelers will need options to move through the project corridor. Improved passenger rail service would increase the resiliency of the transportation system in the corridor. Finally, there is a need to address the long-term rail safety for freight and passenger rail on existing shared railroad right-of-way.

- **Changing Transportation Demand resulting from Demographic Changes**

Transportation demand within the State of Oregon has been changing over the past decade, consistent with a national trend toward reduced driving within and between urban areas. Between 2000 and 2010, Oregon's population became older with fewer households having access to an automobile. In urbanized areas, a growing number of people of legal driving age are also choosing a car-free lifestyle. These demographic trends are contributing to an increasing local and regional demand for non-automobile travel options, including intercity passenger rail service.